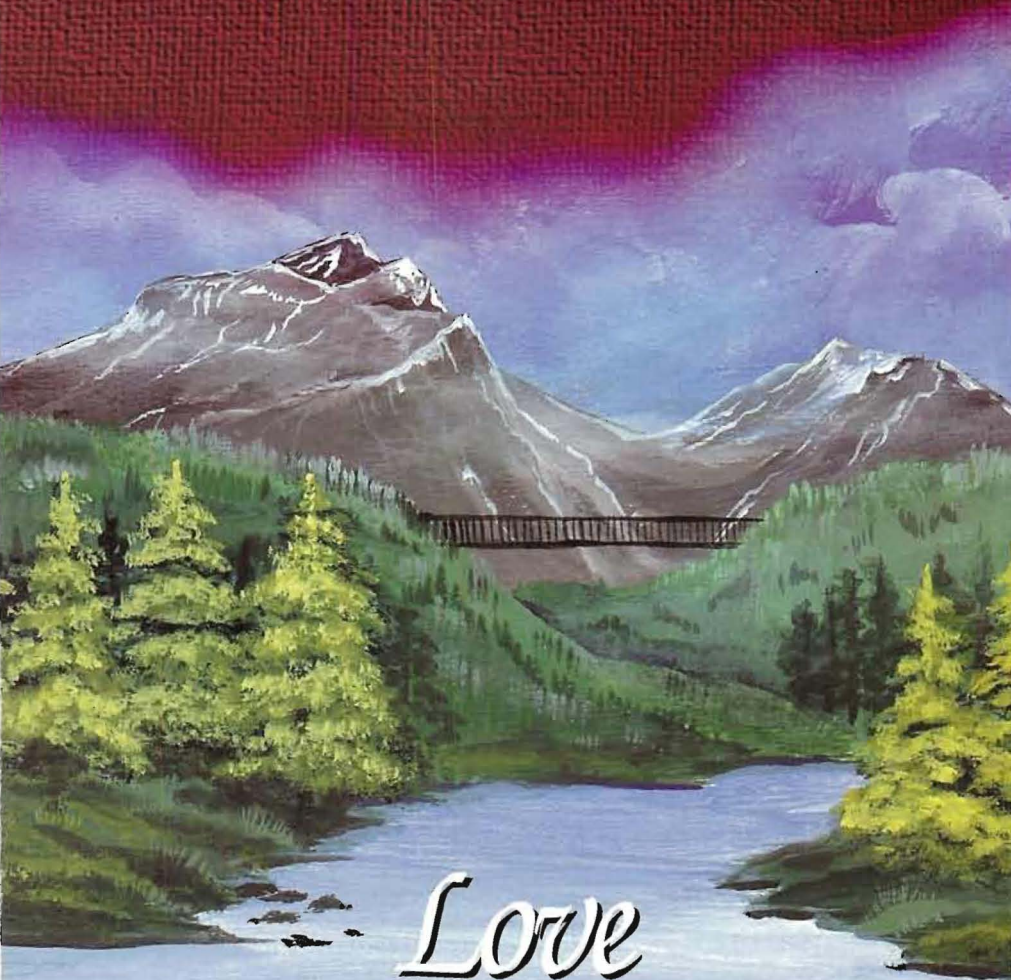


**THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL
GARFIELD HEIGHTS CHURCH OF CHRIST
LECTURESHIP**



*Love
The Brotherhood*

The Garfield Heights Church of Christ

Presents

THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL LECTURESHIP

“Love The Brotherhood”

Charles Blair
Lectureship Director

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Chapter 1

The Purchased Price

Acts 20:28

Kenneth Burleson

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The value of anything is determined by the price paid for it. This should give us tremendous insight into the value and importance of the church. The greatest price that could ever be paid, the blood of Jesus Christ, was paid for the church. We, as purchased individuals, compose the church. The greatest possession we have, our souls, are redeemed by the blood of Christ. *“What shall a man profit if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matt. 16:26).*

To purchase is to buy or redeem. To purchase is to pay the price required. To redeem is to buy back. The blood of Christ redeems us. Sin requires death to justify the sinner. Man could not pay the price. It was also impossible for the blood of animals to take away the sins of the world.

¹“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. ²For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once

purged should have had no more conscience of sins. ³But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. ⁴For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" [Heb. 10:1-4].

Therefore, it was necessary for Christ to die and shed His blood that the sins of men could be forgiven. *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us"* [Heb. 9:12]. *"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation"* [Heb. 9:28]. The blood of Christ reached backward as well as forward. *"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance"* [Heb. 9:15].

Men are not redeemed by corruptible things as silver and gold but by the blood of Jesus Christ. *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: ²³Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever"* [I Peter 1:22,23].

Blood was necessary under every dispensation. It was animal blood under the first two. But it is the blood of Christ under the Christian dispensation. His blood reached backward as well as forward.

It was in His death that His blood was shed. The facts of the Gospel are set forth in 1 Cor. 15:1-4.

¹"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which

also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ²By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴And that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures."

We have redemption through His blood in Him. *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"* [Eph. 1:7].

The Price Was Precious

Jesus Christ was and is precious to us. *"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner"* (1 Peter 2:7). There are many men in the world, but there is only one Saviour. Jesus Christ is so precious that men will live and die for Him.

The blood of Christ is so precious. *"For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your father; ¹⁹But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:18,19). Redemption is possible only through the blood of Christ, the blood of animals could not take away sins. *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"* [Eph. 1:7]. *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins"* [Heb. 10:4].

The precious statements from the cross. The statement of care for His mother. *"Then saith he to*

the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:27). [2] Statement of salvation. *"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). [3] Statement of forgiveness. *"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots"* (Luke 23:34). [4] Statement of physical suffering. *"After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst"* (John 19:28). Nails in His feet and in His hands. [5] Statement of anguish. *"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Matt. 27:46). [6] Statement of triumph. *"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost"* (John 19:30). [7] Statement of trust. *"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said this, he gave up the ghost"* (Luke 23:46).

Precious Memorial

The Lord's Supper is a wonderful memorial to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When we partake of the Lord's supper, it is in memory of Christ. *"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."*²⁵ After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, *This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me"* [1 Cor. 11:24,25]. When we partake of the supper we show forth the death of Christ till He come. *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come"* [1 Cor. 11:26].

In Troas the disciples came together on the first day of the week and ate the Lord's supper. *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight"* [Acts 20:7]. The brethren at Corinth assembled on the first day of the week. *"When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper"* [1 Cor. 11:20]. The assembling together was on the first day of the week. *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"* [1 Cor. 16:2]. Therefore, the early Christians ate the Lord's supper every first day of the week and we are to do that today. The Lord's supper is a very important part of our worship, but it is not the most important part as some have said in the past.

The Cross of Christ

The precious blood of Christ, the purchase price, was shed on the cross. The cross of Christ meant different things to different people. To them that perish foolishness but to the saved it is the power of God. *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God"* [1 Cor. 1:18]. Paul was a preacher of the cross. *"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* [1 Cor. 2:2].

Why the cross of Christ? Man sins and, therefore, separates himself from God. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* [Rom. 3:23]. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* [Rom. 5:12]. *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot*

hear: *²But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear*" (Isa. 59:1-2).

The cross of Christ demonstrated the love of God for mankind. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16). God loved us while we were sinners and unworthy of His love. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:6-8). God did not love us because we were attractive to Him or because we were lovable. *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins...we love him, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:10,19). How many fathers do you know that would be willing to give up their sons for anything? Would anyone allow his son to give one of his limbs for all the money in the world? But, God gave His Son to die a shameful death on the cross for sinful man. What love God hath bestowed on us.

It reveals what sin is and shows to mankind how terrible it is. Sin leaves broken homes, destroyed hearts, lives that have been wrecked, and souls that are damned in its pathway. When one views the scene at Calvary he sees sin at its worst. All of the tragedy, heartache, shame and bitterness of man's history can be summed up in one word; "SIN." We should not call it "human weakness" because God calls it sin. Sin is transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4), it is unrighteousness (1 John 5:17), it is iniquity (Isa. 59:1,2), it is to know God's will, and not do God's will (James 4:17).

Atonement is the foundation of the Christian religion. The doctrine of substitutionary death of

Christ should never be removed from the Christian religion. This religion bears the name of Christ. The removal of this doctrine would remove the only way out of sin. Therefore, no living in heaven. Yes, the doctrine of the vicarious death of Jesus Christ is the very basis of our Christian faith. *“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood and without shedding of blood is no remission”* (Heb. 9:22).

But how could God be just and still justify the sinner? The only solution to the problem of sin was for one without sin to die the death due the sinner. But, there was none on earth. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* [Rom. 3:23]. God’s own Son was the only one capable of doing such. He had the capacity to bear in His own body the sins of the world. In order to become the atonement for sin it was necessary that He come to the earth and live as a man. He would be despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. It would be necessary for Him to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. He would be smitten of God and wounded for our transgressions. He would be bruised for our iniquities, oppressed and afflicted. He would be taken from prison and judgment, and be cut off from the land of the living. He would be stricken for the transgressions of the people. All of these things and many more were accomplished by Jesus Christ when He became a man and lived upon this earth. Unless Christ was both human and divine, the whole doctrine of the vicarious death of Christ is reduced to foolishness.

The cross of Christ has its enemies.

[1] *Denominationalism*. Jesus prayed that we all be one. *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; ²¹That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”* (John 17:20,21). Denominations contribute to this

prayer being unanswered. Why did Christ pray that we be one? "... *that the world may believe thou has sent me*" (v.21). I firmly believe one of the reasons there are so many atheists in the world today is division in the religious world.

[2] *Modernism*. These reject the Bible as the inspired word of God. They ridicule the miraculous conception. The modernists deny the virgin birth of Jesus. Modernism denies the vicarious death of our Lord and say that He was a martyr for His cause.

[3] *Schisms*. "*That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another*" (1 Cor. 12:25). One of the greatest enemies of the cross of Christ today is division. Opposition from without will not do the damage to the cause of Christ like strife from within the church. There is entirely too much jealousy, bickering and slandering among brethren today. "*But if ye bite and devour one another take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*" (Gal. 5:15). The Bible is filled with warnings regarding these people. "*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*" (2 Peter 2:1-2). "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheeps clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ¹⁶Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles*" (Matt. 7:15,16).

[4] *Counterfeit Christian*. When people of the world see members of the church profess one thing and practice another, it has a damaging influence.

²¹"*Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preach-*

est a man should not steal, dost thou steal? ²²Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? ²³Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? ²⁴For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written" [Rom. 2:21-24].

The people of the world know what a Christian ought to be. *"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men; ³Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" [2 Cor. 3:2,3].* Enemies of the cross should stop and think about how this must cause Christ to feel. To look upon man doing this, after all He has done for man, must be heart breaking. Enemies of the cross are a shame and disgrace to the human race.

We Ought To Honor Christ

We honor Christ in obeying the Gospel. The divine pattern of salvation from past sins consists of the following five things: **Hearing.** *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" [Rom. 10:17].* **Believe.** *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" [Mark 16:16].* **Repenting.** *"I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" [Luke 13:3].* **Confessing.** *"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" [Rom. 10:10].* And being **Baptized.** *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer*

of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

We honor Christ by faithfully worshipping in the following way: (1) **The Lord's Supper.** *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).* (2) **Giving of our means.** *"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (1 Cor. 16:2).* (3) **Singing.** *"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19).* (4) **Praying.** *"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).* (5) **Studying and teaching His word.** *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).*

We honor Him by living faithful lives each day, even if it should cost us our life. *"...Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).*

⁶"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Why should we honor Christ? Because He gave the most precious thing (His blood) one could give for the

most precious institution known to mankind (His church).

Conclusion

What a sobering thought, “the purchase price.” The greatest price ever paid. The greatest institution, the church, was purchased with this price. Why will men trample under foot such a precious thing? No doubt, it is because of a lack of love and of ungrateful hearts. It is hard to imagine such ingrates in view of the price paid for US.

May we have even a greater determination to show our love and appreciation toward Jesus Christ. “He paid it all, all to Him I owe.”

Chapter 2

The Eternal Purpose

Ephesians 3:11

Alan Adams

It would be so easy to cite the great apostolic command to *"Love the brotherhood"* [1 Peter 2:17] and chastise people for failing to "love." For too long now, when love is the subject of sermons, classes, or conversation, this is often what is done. A pervasive problem is the fact that many Christians have little or no idea as to the meaning and application of either the term "love" or "brotherhood;" thus, the need for this general lectureship theme—Love the Brotherhood—and lessons pertaining thereto.

It is the burden of this chapter to explain and apply the meaning of that marvelous Pauline phrase, "the eternal purpose" [Eph. 3:11]. In this connection, we propose to show how this "purpose" relates to the Bible doctrine of "the church;" how "the church" is related to the concept of "the brotherhood;" and, how the concept of "eternal purpose" relates to our obligation and privilege to "love the brotherhood." The goal shall be to cause us, through an understanding and appreciation of the "eternal purpose," thereby to have a heightened desire and determination to be fiercely loving and loyal toward "the brotherhood."

The Church And The Brotherhood

In the salutation of his first epistle, Peter spoke of people who were *"the elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of*

Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1-3). He further identifies these "elect" ones as people who, by God, were "*begat...again*" (v.3), and who "*rejoice...receiving the salvation of [their] souls*" (vs.8,9); "concerning which salvation," he said, "*the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you*" (v.10). "These things," he noted, have "*now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you...*" (v.12). They were the people whom God had "called" (v.15) and had "*redeemed, not with corruptible things...but with precious blood...the blood of Christ*" (vs.18,19). They, the former fisherman said, had "*purified [their] souls in...obedience to the truth...having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth*" (vs.22,23).

Such, and only such, believing, obedient, sanctified, redeemed, saved, called, and thereby, elect people, constitute what Peter calls an "*elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession*" (2:9). These indeed are "the people of God" (v.10). These are the people who "glorify God in [the] name" "Christian" (4:16). They are "brethren" (1:22; 3:8; 5:9) who make up "the house [*oikos*, all the persons forming one family] of God" (1 Peter 4:17), a great "brotherhood" which they are commanded to "love" (2:17).

When and how did these erstwhile "*sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*" (1:1) become a part of such an august "brotherhood?" Inspiration has so blessed us with Acts of the Apostles without which there would be an insurmountable information gap between the Gospels and the Epistles. It is here we find the answers to such questions. Years before Peter's penning of his first epistle, we find that Providential preparation had, on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of the Lord, brought together a grand audience of "Jews,

devout men, from every nation under heaven," among whom were "...the dwellers in...Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia" [Acts 2:5-11].

It is probable that the concept of "sojourners of the Dispersion" included Gentile as well as Jewish Christians; and, as such, came in the Christian Era to be used as an antitype with reference to the church of Christ and congregations thereof scattered throughout the Roman world. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to conclude that some of the churches in the regions of "Asia" were partially comprised of Jews who after that first Pentecost returned home as Christians, and were later addressed by Peter in his first epistle.

How had they become such? In Acts chapter two, we find Peter preaching and declaring to those sojourners that the time had come when "*whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" [Acts 2:21]. He affirmed that Jesus is now reigning "*upon his [David's] throne*" (v.30), and that God has made Him "*both Lord and Christ*" (v.36). Hearts being "pricked" by a conviction of sin, some of the "sojourners" cried out, "what shall we do" (v.27). "[U]nto the remission of your sins," commanded Peter, you must "*repent...and be baptized*" (v.38). A number "received his word" and "were baptized" (v.41). "Three thousand souls" were brought together that day. From the description of verses 42-46, they were a specific identifiable community with a common rule, practice, and goal. They were the "the church" (cf. Acts 5:11), "*the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood*" (20:28); and, beginning from that first Pentecost, "the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved" (2:47).

And so it was that many years prior, on that momentous day in Jerusalem, that some people of "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" had "announced unto" them the message and means of salvation "through them that preached the gospel...by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven" (1 Peter 1:12).

These were not of the category of such as who “obey not the gospel of God” (4:17); rather, upon their repentance and baptism they were saved and added to an elect body, or church, of people who had done likewise.

These “people of God” are the “house of God;” they are the “the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15). They are “brethren” (cf. Acts 6:3; 1 Peter 1:22), a “brotherhood” (1 Peter 2:17). The church is the brotherhood, the brotherhood is the church. What is true of one is true of the other. What makes a person a “member” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27) of one is what makes a person a brother in the other.

The Magna Carta Of The Times [Ephesians 1:3-14]

That which makes God laugh, it has been said, are human plans. Nations and civilizations of the past to their peril and destruction failed to understand that they came to be at the behest of God and continued only at His favor (Daniel 4:17,25,32). Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, et al; once great and mighty peoples, they exist today only as fodder for archaeologists. Puffed up people (Rom. 11:20, 25; 12:3; Prov. 25:27; 26:12), full of themselves and devoid of thought beyond the terrestrial (Luke 12:15-20; Matt. 6:19ff; cf. Eccl. 1:2-3; Col. 3:1-2), in surreal fashion scurry about in devotion to purposes and plans which are bound up in a world which “passeth away” (1 John 2:17). “All things,” whether “the things in the heavens” or “the things upon the earth” were/are under God’s control and ultimately “sum[med] up...in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). If God laughs at mortal schemes, it must surely be a laughter tempered with sadness; for only those human plans and purposes which are subordinate to and in harmony with Divine Purpose have value both for “the life which now is, and [for] that which is to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

To have the grand view of the Bible against which all its parts must be understood and applied, one must see God through the ages past as working "unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times" (Eph. 1:10). "The 'times' is a way of describing the period before Christ as a "a series of epochs"¹ during and through which God was working toward the climax "*according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him [Christ]*" (v.9; cf. Gal. 4:4).

It is no understatement to describe verses 3-14 of Ephesians chapter one as The Magna Carta of the Times. This slight, yet ponderous, section of Scripture lays out God's charter, or "will" (vs.5,9,11), formulated "before the foundation of the world" (v.3), and according to which charter it is said that the Architect of the Universe "worketh all things after the counsel of his will" (v.11). It was/is God's "good pleasure" (vs.5,9) to "bless...us with every spiritual blessing" which the "heavenlies [*epouraniois*; plural]" have to offer (v.3). Such blessings include being "chose[n]" to be of the class of those who are "holy and without blemish before Him" (v.4), and is predicated on God's "having foreordained us unto adoption as sons" (v.5). Such noble and glorious purposes are motivated and manifested by "his grace, which he freely bestowed on us" (v.6), and this resulting in the only mechanism by which the Holy God may choose and adopt sinners; that is, their having received "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of...trespasses" (v.7; cf. Rom. 5:9). Not the least of these spiritual blessings is the fact that God has made the "riches of his grace...to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known unto us the mystery of his will" (vs.8-9; cf. 3:2-4). Thus, as to the who, what, when, where, why, and how a sinner receives "redemption" and "forgiveness," this comes by his "*having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of...salvation*" (v.14).

Four times, in this Magna Carta, the phrase "according to" is used (vs.5,7,9,11). Of the Divine

motive, we are told that all is according to His “good pleasure” and His “grace.” Of the Divine directive, we are told that all is according to His “will,” “the counsel of his will,” and His “purpose.” Of the Divine means, we are told that all is accomplished by God and realized by man “in” and “through” Christ (vs.3,4,5, 6,7,11,13). Of the Divine declaration, we are told that both the Jew (“we,” vs.11,12) and the Gentile (“ye,” v.13) were “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (v.13b; cf. Acts 2:1-4,17; 10:44-48); this “seal” being forevermore, *“an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God’s own possession, unto the praise of his glory”* [Eph. 1:14]. There can be no greater aspiration of man than to acquiesce in, subordinate his life to, and be partaker of, the Divine purpose.

The Church Of Christ—The Brotherhood Is The “Eternal Purpose”

To say that “the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.3) arranged to “sum up [*anakephalaioimai*: to condense into a summary] all things in Christ” (v.10) is a classic case of making a long story short. Part of this was His will that *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* [John 1:14]. This God/Man, “Jesus of Nazareth,” became also *“a man approved of God...by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him”* [Acts 2:22]. He was *“delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God...[whereby]...lawless men did crucify and slay”* him (v.23). There, *“redeem[ing]”* (1 Peter 1:18-19), *“justify[ing]”* (Rom. 5:9) blood was shed [John 19:34]. Yet, God *“raised [him] up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it”* (v.24). Thus *“did God raise [Him] up...[and so He is]...by the right hand of God exalted;”* in fact, God has *“made him both Lord and Christ”* [Acts 2:32-36]. It is as “head over all things” that God “gave him” “to the church which is

his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23).

In the meantime, back on Earth, as per the promise of the soon-to-depart Christ (John 14:2), "another comforter," "the Holy Spirit" (vs.16,25), was sent in His stead to guide His apostles "into all the truth" (16:13; Acts 1:5,8; 2:1ff). "[C]lothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), they were able to convince many with a "gospel [that] came not...in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:5). The great outpouring and work of the Holy Spirit was that of revealing and confirming the truth (Acts 2; 10; Heb. 2:3-4), and providing "spiritual gifts...unto the edifying of the church" (1 Cor. 14:12; see cc. 12,14). Because of the Spirit's work, those having "heard the word of the truth, the gospel of...salvation [and having] also believed," were (and may be) said to be "*sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory*" (Eph. 1:13-14).

Following the "we" and "ye" contrast (vs.11,14), we see also that among the things God "purposed" in His great summation of "all things in Christ" (vs.9,10) was the fact that both the Jews, who "had before hoped in Christ" (v.12), and the Gentiles who were once "far off" (2:13,17) constitute "God's own possession" (1:14b). By the "mercy," "love," "grace," "kindness," and "gift of God" (vs.1-10); by the "blood," "peace," "cross," and "preach[ing]" of Christ (vs.13-17); God has "reconciled them both in one body" (v.16; cf. 4:4), "the church" (1:22). This is the brotherhood "where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

This reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one body, or church, "*in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men*" (3:1,4,5). But through

“revelation” the master plan was made “known” to Paul; which matters Paul “wrote...in few words” enabling one and all to “read...[and] perceive” (vs.3,4), among other things, that *“the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel”* (v.6).

Paul was taken away with the fact that though “less than the least of all saints,” yet to him *“was this grace given to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things”* (Eph. 3:9). The great “prophets” of old could not have known the purpose toward which God in ages past was working [1 Peter 1:10-12a]. For them it was *“the mystery of Christ which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit”* (Eph. 3:5). Not even such as the great Michael or Gabriel were given sneak previews of the Divine Intent, for these were “things angels desire[d] to look [*parakupto*: to stoop and look into] into” [1 Peter 1:12b]. Not then, rather “now,” did God intend that *“unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places [these things] might be made known...”* (Eph. 3:10).

Through what, by what, toward what might these heavenly inhabitants point and say, “Aha, now I see what God was doing?” Inspiration says, “through the church” (v.10c). The church² is that climactic manifestation of the “manifold wisdom of God” (v.10b). She was planned (Exodus 25:40; Heb. 8:5; Eph. 1:11), promised (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16), prefigured (Acts 7:38; 1 Cor. 10:1-14; Heb. 9:11; 10:1ff), prophesied (Isaiah 2:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:15; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2), prepared (Luke 1:17; Mark 1:4), produced on Pentecost (Acts 2:47; 5:11; 20:28), and will one day be presented in glory (Eph. 1:14; Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:2;

1 Cor. 15:24); and this is all "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" [Eph. 3:11].

The Eternal Purpose—The Church And Implications As To Our Obligation To Love The Brotherhood

"Love the brotherhood" comes from the verb *agapao* [love] followed by *ten adelphoteta* [the brotherhood] which is in the accusative case. Thayer says, "With an accusative of the thing *agapao* denotes to take pleasure [affection] in the thing, prize [value] it above other things, be unwilling to abandon it or do without it [loyalty]." ³ With this understanding of love and "brotherhood," or the "church," as the object of our love, how is our sense of affection, value, and loyalty toward the brotherhood affected by our understanding of God's "eternal purpose?"

First, *from the standpoint of perspective*. We are part of something far greater than ourselves. We are parts of a marvelous whole (1 Cor. 12:25-27). Ego and the "eternal purpose" are enemies.

Second, *from the standpoint of uniqueness*. That which is the manifestation of God's eternal purpose is by definition one of a kind. How shameful for those among us to equate denominations purposed by man, with the church purposed by God. Let us cease being squeamish about holding forth, as a "city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14) the one and only church of Christ.

Third, *from the standpoint of congregational interrelationship*. Congregations need to stop viewing themselves as "my" church, or "our" church. They are but local parts of the grand whole. Congregational autonomy, Yes. Congregational isolation and no responsibility toward sister congregations and the brotherhood as a whole, No.

Fourth, *from the standpoint of appeal (church growth)*. The value and appeal of the church should

be promoted and understood in light of its place in God's eternal purpose and all that it entails. What faithless folly for brethren to try to promote church growth by seeking to make the church appealing in carnal ways. The Lord's church is no club or fraternity in need of people to "join up." Present her to the world as "a glorious church" (Eph. 5:27) in all her eternal splendor; that alone will suffice or nothing will. Like the words of the Blue Grass song, of the church we should say, "You're perfect just the way you are, I wouldn't change you if I could."

Fifth, *from the standpoint of protectiveness*. If one soul is of greater value than the whole world (Matt. 16:26), then what must be the value of the church, destined and chosen from eternity, and comprised as it is of "spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23)? Love and eternity demand a fierce sense of duty to protect her from those who would do her harm. Brethren who would taint her purity by immoral lives (1 Cor. 5), by "shipwreck[ing]...the faith" (1 Tim. 1:9), or by destructive personalities (3 John 9-11) must not be given free reign. Misguided "love" for people and personal connections which stills needed censure is no love at all, and certainly no love for the brotherhood.

Our proposal to see the "brotherhood" and "the church" as the same entity, and to see the church as the manifestation of God's "eternal purpose" completed; we have accomplished our goal of showing how such understanding ought to heighten our desire to be fiercely loving and loyal toward "the brotherhood."

The "brotherhood" [*adelphotes*, a family or band of brothers; cf. 1 Peter 5:9] comprehends all such persons who have received "redemption through his [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of...[their]...trespasses" (Eph. 1:7); which redemption and forgiveness take place precisely at the point in which convicted, believing, penitent, confessing people submit to being

"baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of...[their]...sins" [Acts 2:14-31]. These are they whom God "foreordained...unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself" (v.5). Equally "sons," or "beloved children" (5:1), and the "household of God" (2:19), they are to one another "brethren" (6:23). They are "called," and have a "calling" (4:4 [*kaleo*, *klesis*]), and thus, collectively are "the church [*ekklesia*, the called out ones]" (1:22; 3:10; 5:23-25,27,29,32). Such is God's "eternal purpose;" let us, therefore, "love the brotherhood" accordingly.

END NOTES

¹A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931], Vol. 4, p. 518.

²Please note that the phrase, "might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God" (v.11), does *not* have reference to the church's active mission in preaching the word so as to make known to people God's wisdom; rather, the church here is depicted as the finished-product through which all, including those in the "heavenly places," can finally know that which God had all along purposed. Besides, the church's mission is to "go...teach all nations" [Matt. 28:19], *not* go teach "principalities and powers in heavenly places" [Eph. 3:10].

³Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974], p. 4.

Chapter 3

The Work Of The Church In Prophecy

Isaiah 6:1-3

Guy F. Hester

If God planned the church before the foundation of the world, and He did [Eph. 3:10-11], do you suppose He would leave it up to the whims and fancies of mortal man to decide what the purpose and work of the church is to be!? There is a prophetic declaration as to the kind of work in which the church is to be engaged, as defined by God, found in Isaiah 61:1-3,

¹“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; ²To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; ³To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”

This was the Lord's message when He came and it must be the message of “the church which is his

body" (Eph. 1:22-23). The Lord Himself read this prophecy in the synagogue at Nazareth and declared that it was fulfilled in Him.

17"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 18The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. 20And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" [Luke 4:17-21].

Here was a case of Christ, our great example, preaching Christ! His message was one of (1) good tidings to the meek, (2) binding up the brokenhearted, (3) proclaiming liberty to the captives, and (4) opening the prisons of those who were bound. In a letter I received from brother Charles Blair last year he said, "If churches were more involved in this instead of this rush for entertainment and a social gospel, our churches would be in better shape." Truer words were never spoken!

Good Tidings To The Meek

"To preach good tidings unto the meek." Jesus said, "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" [Luke 4:18]. In that great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, "Blessed are the meek: for

they shall inherit the earth" [Matt. 5:5]. Jesus Himself, in all of His greatness, was a man of meekness. He said, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls"* [Matt. 11:29]. Again, *"Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass"* [Matt. 21:5]. *"A meek and quiet spirit"* is in the sight of God an *"ornament...of great price"* [1 Peter 3:4].

One of the identifying marks that Jesus was the Messiah was that *"the poor have the gospel preached to them"* [Matt. 11:5]. James said, *"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him"* [James 2:5]? Though one does not have to be financially poor to receive the Gospel, yet they are the ones who are most commonly disposed to be receptive of the Gospel. The Gospel will be received by *"the poor in spirit,"* the meek, the penitent, and the humble. Humility is absolutely essential to the salvation of the soul. Jesus, in teaching a lesson on conversion, said, *"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* [Matt. 18:4]. Another passage is Matthew 23:12, *"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."* James said, *"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* [James 4:6]. Then again, *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up"* [James 4:10]. Then Peter said, *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time"* [1 Peter 5:5-6].

Bind Up Brokenhearted

"He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." In the New Testament, as Jesus made application of this prophecy, He said, *"He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted"* [Luke 4:18]. Jesus was a man of compassion. He sent John's disciples back to tell him that *"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them"* [Matt. 11:5]. Physicians can set broken bones and bind up wounds, but only the Great Physician "can bind up the brokenhearted." He has given us this promise: *"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"* [Matt. 5:4].

Liberty To The Captives

"To proclaim liberty to the captives." In reference to this prophecy, Jesus said, *"He hath anointed me...to preach deliverance to the captives"* [Luke 4:18]. All those who are in sin are in captivity to the devil. Jesus came to set the captive free from sin and death. Ephesians 4:8, *"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."* Second Timothy 2:26, *"And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."* Second Timothy 3:6, *"For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts."*

It was the mission of Jesus into this world "To proclaim liberty to the captives" [Isa. 61:1]. It is to be the mission of the church and every faithful Gospel preacher to proclaim the very same message. This is the message of deliverance to those who are in the captivity of sin. The Hebrew writer said,

⁹"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. ¹⁰For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. ¹³And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. ¹⁴Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" [Heb. 2:9-15].

Opening Of The Prison

"The opening of the prison to them that are bound." This is fully explained by Jesus Himself in John 8:31-36.

³¹"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; ³²And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. ³³They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? ³⁴Jesus answered them, Verily,

verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. ³⁵And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. ³⁶If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Church Today

The church today has the awesome responsibility of preaching good tidings to the meek, binding up the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives and opening the prisons of those who are bound. This can only be done by preaching Christ and Him crucified. Paul wrote concerning the importance of the Gospel to a world enslaved by sin.

¹⁸"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. ²⁰Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. ²²For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: ²³But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" [1 Cor. 1:18-24].

Again in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4,

¹“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ²By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

In giving the charge to young Timothy, Paul said,

¹“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. ⁵But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” [2 Tim. 4:1-5].

John tells us that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). It was the mission of Christ into this world to seek and save the lost. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus said, “For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). The Hebrew writer said, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory

and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

The Gospel is God's power to save the lost. Paul said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).*

Thus the Lord gave the great commission in which He said, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). Marks record says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). Then Luke recorded it this way, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: ⁴⁷And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).*

A problem we are experiencing in the church today is the preaching of a "social gospel." A watered down, ear tickling perverted gospel will not save, but rather will condemn.

⁶"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be

accursed. ⁹As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9).

The primary mission of the church in this world is to preach the soul saving Gospel of Christ which is the eternal purpose of God according to the inspired apostle Paul who said, *"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11).* It has never been the purpose of God that the church be in competition with the world in the entertainment business. When the Lord returns He will *"judge the world in righteousness"* according to His Word. The beloved John wrote

¹²"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

¹³And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

¹⁴And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12-15).

It was never intended that the church be the FUN place to be, but the RIGHT place to be. The one who is a genuine Christian finds real joy in the fellowship of Christ and other Christians.

Chapter 4

The Kingdom That Would Stand Forever

Daniel 2:44

Jack Phillips

There is no more evident truth found upon the pages of Scripture than that surrounding the Lord's kingdom. Evidence is overwhelming that from the beginning, as God made promise of salvation through Christ at Calvary, that those being saved by His redemptive plan would be citizens in this spiritual kingdom. And yet, we see no institution more misunderstood, with more misapplication than that of the kingdom God. Among these views is that of the dispensational or premillennial view which states that the kingdom is futuristic and not presently in existence. In fact, it is estimated that as much as 75% of all Christendom believes in some form of the millennial view. Let us examine, to some degree, this philosophy with its obvious untruths.

Books, tracts, pamphlets, and articles have been written to provide a jumping off place for many false applications that are used regarding this subject. This popular theory determines that Jesus will come again at some future time to raise the righteous dead who will live and reign with Him for 1,000 years. The wicked dead will remain in the grave until the 1,000 year period is over. This 1,000 year period will begin with a seven year period known as the rapture in which time Christ and His church will reside in a particular location. During this seven year time period, the world will go through great tribulation. This period varies with different religions.

During the 1,000 year reign of Christ, the Jewish temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem and Jewish sacrifices will be reinstated. The Mount of Olives will be split open and two rivers running to the Mediterranean Sea and to the Dead Sea will flow from its brink. During this time, the devil is to remain bound, but after the 1,000 year reign of Christ has expired, the devil will be loosed to gather his forces both dead and living against the forces of Christ to fight on the plains of Mageddo, the battle of Armageddon. This battle will have heavy casualties but will ultimately be won by Christ to be followed by final judgment.

Bro. R. M. Hogan, a noted black preacher of the Gospel, was in a tent meeting in Texas some years ago. It was customarily a part of his work to provide a question box at a location in the tent for persons to ask questions which would be answered at the close of each service. In it was this question: "What's premillennialism?" He replied: "*pre* means before; *millennial* means a thousand; and *ism* means it just ain't so." Premillennialism teaches two resurrections separated by a thousand years during which time Jesus would reign on earth over His kingdom. But if we understand the truth relevant to this kingdom, and particularly the teaching of Jesus on this matter, we too will conclude why this "just ain't so."

We do not find the Bible ever speaking of a rapture, nor that the temple destroyed in 70 A.D. would ever be rebuilt. Neither does the Bible ever teach that Jewish sacrifice would be reinstated, but rather that all sacrifices were done away with by the coming of Jesus, and that He is once, for all, forever our sacrifice for sin. In Hebrews 10:12, the Scripture states, "*but this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sin for ever sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens.*" If such were true, the whole book of Hebrews, along with a host of other writings, are of absolutely no benefit whatsoever. Nor does the Bible speak of a literal splitting of the Mt. of Olives or

of a literal binding of Satan. Nor is the battle of Armageddon a literal battle to be fought upon a literal battlefield of carnal warfare. Furthermore, it would be highly unlikely that our Lord would take up weapons to fight this carnal battle after having instructed Peter to, "put up thy sword, into its place," and also in conversation with Pilate to say, "My kingdom is not of this world, for had my kingdom been of this world then would my servants have fought to deliver me out of the hands of the Jews" [John 18:36].

Planning And Preparation For The Coming Kingdom

The preaching of "the kingdom is at hand" was begun by John the Baptizer and was continued by Christ after John's imprisonment. After Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He went into the synagogues preaching the Gospel of the kingdom [Matt. 4:23]. The purpose of Christ's coming was to establish His kingdom. Although Jesus came to seek and save the lost, the kingdom was the established means by which this was accomplished [Luke 19:10].

The people of that time could relate to a form of government known as a kingdom. Their predecessors had experienced Babylonian captivity under Nebuchadnezzar; Medo-Persian captivity under Darius and Cyrus; Grecian captivity under Alexander the Great; and Roman captivity under the Caesars. With this arrangement in mind, their concept of what constituted a kingdom was clearly in mind. Is it no wonder, then, that the prophecy of Daniel 2:44 is placed in a kingdom setting having a territory, subjects, a king, and a law?

As Jesus prepared to establish His kingdom, it was necessary to describe its nature and character so it was called the kingdom of heaven. Kingdom is defined as "reign." Heaven was its source. Its territory is the hearts of men. So we may say that it is the

reign of heaven in the hearts of men. So all of the preaching of Christ, beginning at Jordan and ending at Calvary, pointed, to one single thing, the establishment of His kingdom on Pentecost. Jesus' kingdom was not of this world; it had no geographical or territorial boundary as defined by other kingdoms [John 18:36]. Jesus said, "*now is my kingdom not from hence,*" it is here, but it is not from here; it's from heaven. So this Scripture, along with a host of others, repudiate the concept that Jesus will come at a future time to establish His kingdom to reign over it 1,000 years. In fact, nowhere in Scripture will it be found that the Lord will ever set foot on this earth again [1 Thess. 4:13-17].

The Character Of The Kingdom

The Pharisees demanded of the Christ that He tell them when the kingdom of God should come. They were unwilling to accept Jesus as the Promised Messiah, but all Jews knew that whenever the Messiah did come, He would establish His kingdom. All of the prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah had a connection with the coming of His kingdom. The pursuit of the Jews in this matter was that the Messiah's kingdom would be materialistic in nature to overthrow Rome and its Caesars to bring back to Israel the glory it had once known under its great kings.

Jesus' reply was, "*the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.*" It has no geographical territory; no well-equipped armies; but it is totally spiritual in character [Luke 17:20]. It is in us and can only be entered into by those following God's will [Luke 17:21]. When a person enters this kingdom, this kingdom enters them; that is its nature and character.

Conversion has never been a condition of placement into any earthly kingdom, but to enter into Christ's kingdom, we must be converted [Matt. 18:3].

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night and was told that to enter the kingdom of God, one must be born again of water and of the Spirit. The purpose of this meeting was to establish who Jesus was; He had all the credentials of being a teacher come from God but Nicodemus was uncertain if He was the Christ. Nicodemus, as did other Jews, thought that whenever the Kingdom came they could enter it unconditionally on their Abrahamic heritage and Israelite citizenship. As in any birth process, there must be two elements: the begetting and the bringing forth. In this metaphor, the Spirit through the Word, is used for the begetting (James 1:18). All life, whether animal, plant, or spiritual, must be germinated through seed (Luke 8:11). Water is the element of the new birth. Baptism into Christ brings forth a new creature; and the result is a new birth (Rom. 6:3,4). Jesus drops the metaphor in Mark 16:16: there is no difference in "he that believeth and is baptized" than "born of water and of the Spirit." Jesus told Nicodemus what to do, not at that time, but what the conditions would be to enter into the kingdom whenever it was established.

Jesus further explains, *"that which is born of the flesh is flesh."* Nicodemus was an Israelite by natural birth. And, *"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,"* signifying that the new birth was to take place in the inner man. It is the inner man or the spirit of man that is the subject of the new birth (Rom. 1:9).

He continues, *"the wind bloweth where it listeth and thou heareth the sound and canst not tell whether it cometh or whither it goeth, so is he [everyone] that is born of the spirit."* Jesus here shifts from birth itself, to the one being born. When He is making this statement, He is not talking of the new birth, nor the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the souls going through conversion, but upon the one being born again. Some attempt to make the new birth mystical and mysterious; more felt than told.

Why? Because wind is an invisible element of invisible origin; so also the new birth deals with the invisible part of man; the inner man and not with the fleshly, physical, outer man. This was a new kingdom with new terms and conditions of entrance. Although Nicodemus was a member of the Israelite kingdom, he was not a member of Christ's kingdom until he met its terms and conditions. Nicodemus waited for the coming kingdom after the death of Christ (Mark 15:43; Luke 24:51; Matt. 16:27). Whenever the Spirit came, the power came; whenever the power came, the kingdom also came.

Examining The Principles Of The Kingdom

I direct your attention to the 5th Chapter of Matthew and verses 1-12, in undoubtedly the beginning of 111 verses recording the greatest sermon ever preached. I am referring to Christ's great Sermon on the Mount. Brother Foy Wallace, Jr., states regarding this brief section, and I quote, "this is kingdom legislation." Below are listed, in their respective orders, those things which Jesus had in mind: principles which govern the life style of those who are citizens of this spiritual kingdom.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." When we speak of a poor man, we think of what he does or does not have. The above is not a reference to what we have, but to what we are. While the rich are considered independent, the poor in spirit are those dependent upon the teachings of Christ to direct them into His kingdom.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Mourning here does not merely refer to grief nor does the comfort refer to consolation. But this is a reference to John's statement, *"behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin (not sins) of the world."* Sins are mistakes, misdeeds, and wrongdoing, but sin refers to a barrier between God and

man. The vale of the temple was a constant reminder of this barrier between God and man, but at Calvary, that vale was rent in twain from top to bottom so that the barrier between God and man was once and forever removed by the saving blood of Jesus Christ. Those mourning were doing so over sin and would only be comforted by the Good News of the Gospel [Matt. 11:29-30].

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Most people wrongly associate meekness with complacency; with being able to trample down or run over the meek. The concept that non-resistance is meek is wrong; Moses was a meek man but a fighting man. Meekness may be defined as "full and complete control of the faculties of one's being." Example: Captain guiding a ship steadily through a storm. Jesus knew that His followers would meet stiff opposition from both the Jews and the Romans, but if they could overcome, they would fill the whole earth, with Christ's Gospel. To inherit the earth did not involve stocks and bonds, silver and gold, houses and lands, but the penetrating force of Christ's teachings upon all mankind.

"Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Righteousness involves justification and pardon in this text and is not speaking of God's character [Rom. 1:16,17]. The Jews knew that God was righteous, but through ignorance they set up their own terms of pardon and justification [Rom. 10:1-3]. The Gospel tells man how God makes man righteous and how God forgives and justifies sinful men. These have accepted the full measure of the Gospel; they were not coerced, but persuaded by their own desire for it. Those in the kingdom have a righteousness, or law of justification, of pardon, that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It is through our acceptance of obedience to these Gospel truths that our spiritual

appetites are gratified in meeting our every spiritual need.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” It has been stated that, “this beatitude is evangelistic or mission in mind from its nature, for we are all the subject of God’s mercy.” So, as we become the recipients of God’s mercy, we too become merciful by not withholding it from others as we share the Gospel with them. People must be taught to receive God’s mercy by being baptized (Titus 3:5), so that baptism becomes an act of God’s mercy and not a work of righteousness.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” This pureness of heart does not involve chastity or virtue, but rather understanding. The pure heart is the enlightened heart, even as the eye that is single sees clear (Eph. 1:15). Only by understanding, knowing, and being enlightened will one be able to see God’s way clearly.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” He is not an arbitrator of men, but one who has made peace between himself and God. It is the peace of reconciliation that comes through the Gospel (Rom. 10:15). Every man, telling others to make peace with God, is himself a peace maker, and by doing so are designated as children of God.

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is the true, acid test of discipleship, is to be willing to withstand every opposition and hardship for the cause of Christ. This proves that you are in the kingdom and that the kingdom is in you.

The kingdom of heaven is truly “the reign of heaven in the hearts of men.” It began with a thought in the mind of God which was planned, prophesied, and then executed. In our text, God made a promise that it would be of eternal duration. When time shall be no more and the masses of humanity will give an

account before God in that great day, the kingdom will remain intact. As that great separation takes place to distribute into their appropriate places the saved from the lost, the kingdom will remain intact. We are assured at the end that Jesus will deliver the kingdom back to the Father [1 Cor. 15:24-25] but even though the end will come the kingdom is without end.

With these truths intact, it will be those kingdom citizens who have faithfully discharged their duties and responsibilities in following the leadership of the King of kings and Lord of lords who will experience the blessings of heaven. Paul writes in Colossians 1:13 and 14 that these have been "*delivered from the powers of darkness and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son: having received redemption through His blood.*" We may note that the purchased price of this kingdom's existence is the "shedding of blood." Those who have received redemption and forgiveness by the shedding of blood have constituted this kingdom. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that these who are kingdom citizens will be received as the eternal inhabitants of that unending kingdom.

But, in this final judgment scene, where the great separation takes place, a separation from among this kingdom will also occur. We have often been confronted by those of our denominational contemporaries with that penetrating question, "will only members of the church of Christ go to heaven?" I would dare say that a more appropriate consideration is that there are going to be those from the church of Christ who will not go to heaven either! The Lord, by his own admission, makes it clear that, "*the Lord shall send forth his angels to gather out of his kingdom those who offend and do iniquity to cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 13:41-42). There appears to be many things which threaten the pureness and holiness of the Lord's kingdom while it remains in its

present condition, but its future is sure and certain. We may have ungodly members now, but there will be no ungodly members in heaven. We may have those who filter through our ranks to commit adultery here, but no adultery will be there. We may have those who misuse and abuse their rights to be called members of the Lord's church here, but no such person will be there. We may have those who are busybodies, gossips, and false witnesses while here, but you can be assured that this separation will take care of that problem.

When the Lord comes again to receive His own, the kingdom that we see in its future state will be completely pure. He is coming again that He might receive His church as glorious, holy, and without spot [Eph. 5:25-27]. In order for this to take place, we who are His subjects must do our work now and do it well. Our Lord, Himself, laid out the plans He wanted for its design and continued maintenance. It is a no nonsense approach that tells us with great clearness and accuracy that there are just some things that are better off left alone. His plans are perfect and complete. I, you, nor even the modern change agents of our day can improve upon what God has already designed as His ideal to accomplish His will here on earth.

Our objective today should be clear. There is only one King over this kingdom and that is Jesus Christ. There is only one Law which governs this kingdom and that is His New Testament Will. There is one territory which the Lord concerns Himself with conquering at the present and that is the whole world. And, there should be one objective that those who are His subjects should have and that is to bring others to a knowledge of saving truth. May I leave you with these words, *"wherefore we receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear"* [Heb. 12:28].

Chapter 5

They All May Be One

John 17:21

Sidney White

As we begin this study, let me state my awareness that no effort on my part to adequately describe the contents of this prayer would be sufficient. One who studies this prayer must be impressed with its *character*, its *tone* and its *tenderness*. Neither can one overlook the triumphant expectation contained within it. But when we read and hear the explanations of some, even among our brethren, the need for a study of this prayer is readily recognized. Some explanations obviously confuse "unity" with "union," and because of such confusion the idea of "unity in diversity" springs forth. It is the mission of the church to make disciples, and the existence of unity as set forth in this prayer is just one (but a major one) aspect of that mission.

This prayer can be divided into four major points: 1) Jesus' prayer for Himself (vs. 1-5), 2) Jesus' prayer for His immediate disciples (vs. 6-19), 3) Jesus' prayer for all who would believe on Him "through their word" (vs.20-23) and 4) Jesus' prayer that His disciples may be with Him in eternity (vs. 24-26).

Unity Is A Good And Pleasant Thing

Psalm 133:1 states, "*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*" Unity is good and pleasant because it is Godlike. It is good and pleasant because it makes Christian fellowship possible; and, the greater the

unity, the greater the fellowship. There is little more depressing to the emotions than an atmosphere of strife and division. There is little more soothing and satisfying than a spirit of peace and harmony. The degree of that unity is expressed in John 17:11 and 22, as Jesus uses Himself and the Father as an example.

During Jesus' earthly ministry the disciples had questioned who is greatest in the kingdom. Some had even sought the chief seats (Mark 9:34; 10:35ff). But Jesus taught that true greatness was in service. One who desires to be first will be "*servant of all*" (Mark 9:35). But where unity exists, envy, jealousy, self-seeking and the love of place and power will be removed. Such would eliminate the Diotrophes complex (3 John 9). Those who strive for such unity will not be among those who desire pre-eminence. Rather, such unity will generate love of brethren, counting others better than self, in honor preferring one another and seeking the good of others. What a wonderful thing it is to be able to work among brethren who desire and strive for such unity.

God Hates Discord And Division

While it is a good and pleasant thing to dwell together in unity, such will not always happen. But when such unity is absent, there is no doubt about God's feelings in the matter. In Proverbs 6:16-19, the writer lists six things, yea, seven things that are an abomination — things which God hates. Among those seven things is "*he that soweth discord among brethren*" (Prov. 6:19). That Old Testament principle is set forth time and again. However, the same principle is just as clearly set forth in the New Testament. "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same*

mind and in the same judgment" [1 Cor. 1:10]. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you, envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men" [1 Cor. 3:3]? Paul tells us to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" [Rom. 16:17].

Surely there can be no doubt as to God's feelings about division and those who cause it. Any congregation that is filled with strife and contention is in violation of Jesus' desire as expressed in this prayer. Knowing the way God feels about division and those who cause it, and knowing of the unity for which Jesus' prayed and for which He gave His life, can one suggest a greater sin that one could commit than to divide and destroy a congregation of God's people?

"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" [Matt. 12:25]. Those guilty of strife, contention and division need to take note. Dividing the church over trivial matters [preachers, song books, color of carpet, time of services, etc.] shows just how unimportant Christian unity is to those guilty of such.

God Commands That We Keep The Unity Of The Spirit Eph. 4:1-16

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ²with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" [Eph. 4:1-3]. But we must realize that not all unity is "the unity of the Spirit." Satan and his forces are united against godliness and righteousness, but that does not constitute "unity of the Spirit." Some people promote "union," but that is an entirely

different thing than keeping “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The unity for which our Lord prayed is accomplished through acceptance of and obedience to truth. *“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. ⁴⁷And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* [Acts 2:41,47b].

Christ is referred to as *“the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him”* (Heb. 5:8-9). Acceptance of and obedience to truth demands a willingness to turn away from the ways of the world. Jesus said of His disciples, *“they are not of the world”* (John 17:16a). Acceptance of truth will separate us from the world and keep us together. Study carefully 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1. In that context Paul said, *“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you...”* *“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (6:17; 7:1). John describes all that is in the world as the *“lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,”* reminding us that such *“is not of the Father, but is of the world”* (1 John 2:15-17). John’s teachings in these verses demand that we have not the spirit of the world. Paul lists seventeen specific things, calling them the *“works of the flesh”* (Gal. 5:19-21), concluding *“that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”* (v.21).

In Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus, he reminds them of the kind of people they were *“in time past”* (2:2a). They were people who *“walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”* (2:2). According to Paul, they *“were dead in trespasses and sins”* (2:1,5), but now they have been *“quickened”* or made alive (2:4-6). James speaks of *“wars*

and fightings" among brethren which come from *"lusts that war in your members"* (James 4:14). Verse 4 sums it all up. *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* One of the major problems that causes much disunity among God's people is a love for the world among some members. There is no way for those who are friends of the world and enemies of God to promote the unity of the Spirit. So long as we attempt to hold on to the ways of the world, we will contribute to the violation of Jesus' prayer for unity.

Sanctification comes through truth. *"Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). Christians are saints (sanctified), resulting from the influence of the truth in their lives. Incidentally, would this not eliminate some mysterious, direct operation of the Holy Spirit to bring about sanctification? Sure it would! Peter encourages Christians to *"grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18). John encourages us to *"walk in the light, as he is in the light"* and in so doing *"we will have fellowship one with another"* (1 John 1:7). Such a walk and growth will promote the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer for unity. Was this not a part of the problem in Corinth? Instead of being spiritually minded, they were carnally minded, thus unable to properly feed upon the word of God (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Envy, strife and division was the result, not the unity for which Jesus prayed.

Examples To Consider

There are several incidents recorded in the New Testament where unity existed and was disrupted, along with explanation as to how the problem was settled. The unity of the early church is spoken of in

several places. *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart”* (Acts 2:46). *“And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord...”* (Acts 4:24). To what extent any disruption in that unity was caused, we know not, but we read in Acts 5 of Ananias and Sapphira and their leaving the word of God, lying about finances. That matter was settled promptly by both of them being struck dead. I wonder if some might be more careful not to disrupt peace and unity in the church if that same means were used today? Then in Acts 6 we find a disturbance as the Grecians murmured against the Hebrews *“because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration”* (Acts 6:1ff). The apostles immediately set forth a plan of action designed to settle this matter. How many problems become major because church leaders allow them to go unattended rather than immediately taking action? Their murmuring was stopped at once. It was “nipped in the bud.” Can we not learn from such an example as we *“endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?”*

In Acts 15 we find the record of another problem arising that caused *“no small dissension and disputation”* (Acts 15:2). Some were teaching that salvation was not possible without circumcision. As a result, a solution or plan of action was instigated to solve the controversy. Truth settled this particular problem.

It seems to me that unity can be established and maintained as long as those involved are willing to accept the truth and so long as those responsible will initiate an immediate plan of action to dissolve any point of disruption. Every congregation, from the time of the beginning of the church until now, that has kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is an answer to this prayer.

Six Pertinent Passages

Numerous passages could be cited in this section that relate to unity, an answer to Jesus' prayer. However, because of time and space, we shall limit this part of the study to six passages that relate to this matter. Hopefully the remarks relative to each of these passages will cause further study on your part, as this material is in no way designed to be an exhaustive study.

1) **John 17:21** — *"that they all may be one."* Jesus prayed for the apostles (vs.6-19), and then prayed for all *"which shall believe on me through their word"* (v.20). His prayer for the apostles was important because they were given the responsibility as earthen vessels to receive God's word from the Holy Spirit and then carry that Gospel into all the world. How could anyone minimize such a responsibility? Yet Jesus' interests involved more than just the twelve. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians were sects among the Jews — denominations among the Jews. Was Jesus here praying for them to form some kind of religious union in spite of their doctrinal differences? How could anyone in a right mind suggest that Jesus was praying for a first century ecumenical movement — forget your doctrinal differences and just love one another? There is nothing to indicate such. The unity for which Jesus prayed was based on Truth, not forgetting the differences. And, the fact that Jesus prayed for unity shows the importance of it. Not only are we impressed with the importance of unity by this prayer, but also the degree of that unity. With regard to the apostles, as well as the "all," Jesus prayed to the Father that they be one *"even as we are one"* (John 17:11,22). Again, with these statements in mind, how absurd it is to suggest the kind of "unity" (union) set forth by religious leaders in general, and by the change agents among our own brethren. One cannot remain outside

the body of Christ and obey God. Neither can one obey God and divide the body. Obviously, this prayer has not touched the hearts of those who promote denominationalism, nor has it touched the hearts of those who sow discord within the body of Christ. Go back and read again this prayer and note within it the times Jesus makes reference to the word of God: *"they have kept thy word"* (v.6), *"For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me and they have received them"* (v.8), *"I have given them thy word"* (v.14), *"Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth"* (v.17), *"that they also might be sanctified through the truth"* (v.19), *"but for them also which shall believe on me through their word"* (v.20). How could any honest and truth-seeking person miss the point and basis of unity?

2) **Ephesians 4:1** — *the foundation and pillars of unity*. Since other lessons in this series will be discussing various aspects of this text in detail, allow me to simply and briefly mention a few points. Within this text there are seven points (pillars) upon which unity can be built. "One body" would definitely suggest unity in organization (Eph. 1:22-23). "One Spirit" would declare unity in revelation. Even with the various spiritual gifts, Paul affirms "by the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12; John 14:26; 16:13). "One hope" would give unity of life, desire and expectation (Heb. 6:18-19). "One Lord" provides unity of authority (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23). "One faith" denotes unity of message (Gal. 3:24ff). "One baptism" shows the unity of practice and "one God" unites us in worship (John 4:24). Within these seven ones is "one body." There is an abundance of evidence within the Scriptures relative to the concept of "one body," just one of which we can be members with God's approval. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord's house (not houses) would be established in the last days, and that all nations shall flow unto "it" (not them). He refers to it as the "house of God" (Isa. 2:1-4), and Paul explains

that the house of God "is the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15). So whether one uses the term "house," "body," "church," or some other Biblical word referring to the body, the term is singular (cf. Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13,20; Col. 1:18). That suggests, yea, demands unity. Jesus, during His earthly ministry, spoke of the "one body" as the "kingdom" (not kingdoms), "my church" (not churches), "one fold" (not folds), all lending support to the unity that God expects and for which Christ prayed (Matt. 4:17; 16:16-18; John 10:16-18). The very purpose of the cross was to *"reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross..."* (Eph. 2:16). To advocate acceptance of various organizations, various plans of worship, various contradictory doctrines, etc. is to oppose the very purpose of the cross. There is to be "one new man" (Eph. 2:14-15), Christ gave Himself for "it," or the church (Eph. 5:25-27). When Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), no one who heard that statement would believe that Christ shed His blood for several churches. Unity is so evident! It is so evident that those who promote, and even thank God for all denominations, have not stayed with the truth, but have allowed their desires and emotions to control. Those of our brethren who advocate fellowship with people other than those in Christ's body have left the truth. Such "union" is not the unity that exists between God and Christ (John 17:11,22), but an effort to be at peace with error and those who promote it. There is certainly no Biblical basis for such.

3) **1 Corinthians 4:17** — *"Every where in every church."* There was a time when, with perhaps few exceptions, one travelling our country could find a building with a sign out front reading "church of Christ," stop and worship with those meeting there and be comfortable knowing that such worship was Biblical. Such is not the case now. However, that was

the case with Paul's preaching. He did not preach one doctrine in Ephesus and another doctrine in Corinth. He speaks *"of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church"* (1 Cor. 4:17). *"But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches"* (1 Cor. 7:17). *"But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God"* (1 Cor. 11:16). *"As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye"* (1 Cor. 16:1). From these few verses it is evident that Paul taught the same thing wherever he went. He was guided by the Holy Spirit to do so. Why should it be any different today? Who has given the authority to change and allow us to fellowship people regardless of what they teach? The answer is obvious — not God!

4) 1 Corinthians 1:10 — plea for unity. As our Lord prayed for unity, so those who carried the message of Christ throughout the world continued to call for unity. Such is the case with Paul's statement to the church at Corinth. *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you: but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Cor. 1:10). This statement was made by the Apostle Paul who backs the statement with the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. He begs these brethren to *"speak the same thing."* Later in the same letter he reminds them of the things he had spoken to them, by which they were saved (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Even in Paul's day, men were not speaking the same thing as evidenced by Galatians 1:6-9. He encouraged the Corinthian brethren against divisions. He exhorted them to be *"perfectly joined together,"* or as he exhorted the Colossian brethren, *"being knit together in love"* (Col. 2:2). He pleaded for the Corinthians to be joined together *"in the same mind."* This was an encouragement for them to use their mental faculties

guided by truth. Far too many today are being moved in some direction by emotions rather than a properly guided mind. His desire was for the Corinthians to be in the same judgment. The direction of their will was to be guided by God's word. This one verse and the five specific phrases of exhortation contained therein will completely destroy the agenda of the change agents among us.

5) **John 10** — *one fold, one shepherd*. Throughout the earthly ministry of Christ, He put forth His teachings in such simple language. Only those who did not want to understand missed the point. Think of the various parables He used to teach such great spiritual truths. The people to whom He spoke understood the matter of sowing, crop failure, fishing, barren fruit trees and hidden treasures. Likewise, they would understand the significance of "*one fold*" and "*one shepherd*" (John 10:16). It is a shame that the religious people of our day cannot understand it. It is even more shameful that many of our own brethren have missed the point. Jesus laid down His life for that one fold (John 10:17-18), yet most people refuse to accept the implications of it. In that same context, there are too many hirelings in the form of elders (so-called) who are allowing the sheep to be devoured by ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15). Not only must we respect the one-fold concept, but the sheep of that fold must be protected.

6) **Philippians 2:1-11** — Much is said within these verses that will help us as we endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit." In verse one is a list of things that will serve as the source of unity. Consider these four phrases: "*consolation in Christ*," "*comfort of love*," "*fellowship of the Spirit*," "*bowels and mercies*." In verse two there are three phrases that give us the manner of accomplishing that unity: be like-minded or of one mind, having the same love, of one accord. There is no way one can honestly read this verse and conclude that to "agree to disagree" or

“unity in diversity” is God’s answer to unity. Verses three and four provide a good basis for unity in the form of humility. If that were not sufficient, Paul then gives us, in verses five through eleven, a perfect example in Christ. When we have the mind of Christ, unity will prevail. The mind of Christ, as set forth in this section, involves a mind of *unselfishness* (v.6), a mind of *service* (v.7), a mind of *humility* (v.8a) and a mind of *obedience* (v.8b). The result is set forth in verse nine. Any one of these six sections of scripture would eliminate denominationalism and stop the change-agents in their tracks, if applied. It is amazing how people can ignore so much teaching on unity. This spirit of Christian unity involves a spirit of mutual agreement in doctrine [one faith], a spirit of united participation in work, a spirit of consistent practice in Christian living and a spirit of concern in personal relations. Yet there is so much division in the body. It is condemned [1 Cor. 1:11-12; 3:1-17]. It is brought on by false teaching and ungodly living [1 Tim. 6:3-10]. It is of the devil [James 3:13-18]. We need to strive with every ounce of energy we have to establish and maintain the unity for which our Lord prayed and died.

Conclusion

The unity discussed in this study will result in the death of all religious bodies except the body of Christ, over which He is the head [1 Cor. 12:12,13,20, 25]. How could anyone thank God for all the differing denominations, yet religious leaders do just that. We must cease efforts toward alliances, unions, federations, joint activities and the like that are nothing more or less than a violation of the Lord’s prayer for unity. Oneness in Christ is the basis of unity and the divine standard that must be adopted. We must realize the benefits of unity [Psa. 133] and recognize the basis of unity [Eph. 4:1-6] if we are to reap the

harvest of unity [John 17:24]. The unity for which Jesus prayed can be seen and appreciated by the world [John 17:21b]. A lack of it divides and destroys [Matt. 12:25-26].

Chapter 6

Edifying The Church

1 Corinthians 14

Danny Butler

I appreciate the opportunity to be invited to have a part in the lectures at Garfield Heights for the third time. It is an honor to be associated with brother Charles Blair, the elders, and faithful saints of this good congregation. The elders are to be commended for their leadership and strong stand for the "Old Paths." I always enjoy my stay in Indianapolis during this time. The hospitality is wonderful. May God continue to bless the family of God at Garfield Heights.

The subject assigned to me is "Edifying The Church" — a study of the word as it appears in chapter 14 of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.

The Text

The verse assigned is 1 Corinthians 14:26. It reads: *"How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying."* This verse has been used and abused in an attempt to prove the scripturalness of choirs and solos in the worship of the church. To put it in simple terms, IT DOES NOT PROVE ANYTHING OF THE SORT!

Paul is not discussing the issues mentioned, but the effect of those things mentioned. Howard Winters in his commentary on First Corinthians says.

"Whether it be a song, a lesson, a language, a revelation, or an interpretation, the right course to follow in the assembly is to edify or build up the church. The problem at Corinth was everyone wanted to exercise his gift even to the generating of strife between the brethren. With the various gifts there came the human weakness of wanting to be in the lime light. The result was confusion and no one was edified and contentions became widespread."

In the commentary on First Corinthians by McGarvey and Pendleton, the position is expressed as follows.

"Since those who spoke with tongues were not understood, they could all speak at once without any loss. Thus confusion was fostered and encouraged, and those who came with other contributions to the service, such as psalms, teachings, revelations, etc., were prevented from conferring any benefit upon the congregation. The apostle, therefore, orders the babel of tongues to be suppressed, that the congregation might be edified by these other contributions."

It is plain to see that it was the case that Paul was teaching order in the worship assembly that all may be edified as evidenced by the statement, "*Let all things be done unto edifying.*" These brethren agree with Winters, though their position is stated differently. With this understanding of the text, let us examine the word "edify," "edification," or "edifying" as Paul used it.

The Word “Edify” Defined

The word “edify” comes from the Greek word *oikodome* meaning, “The act of building up...it is used in the New Testament in the sense of edification, the promotion of spiritual growth and the development of spiritual character in believers” (*Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, pages 17,18]. The word is defined in *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* on page 396 as; 1) To instruct or improve spirituality, 2) to instruct or improve, especially in moral and religious knowledge.

The Word As Paul Used It

Paul used some form of the word edify seven times in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 of our King James version of the English Bible. Notice these seven verses and consider the apostles’ use of the word. It is found one time in verse 3: It reads, “*But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*” The one prophesying speaks for the purpose of edification, that is, to build up or promote spiritual growth. This is in harmony with both the Greek and Webster’s definition. This affects the thought that prophesying or preaching as God would have it is to edify the church. If edification is not the goal and result of one’s proclamation of the word, then something is wrong. This issue will be discussed in detail later.

In verse 4 we read: “*He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*” It is apparent from this reading that the one who spoke in an unknown tongue was the only one who understood the speaking. It appears also from the text that there is a difference in speaking in an unknown tongue and prophesying. The difference must be in the language

used. Unknown tongues DO NOT EDIFY, but prophesying does. Therefore, it is logical to assume that the prophesying was done in a language that all in the assembly could understand. Why? Because all were edified, that is, built up or encouraged to live a more conducive life to the masters instruction.

At verse 5 we read, *"I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying."* The emphasis here is on prophesying that the church may receive the edifying. Verse five is actually a commentary on verse four. McGarvey and Pendleton make the following comments on this verse.

The gift of tongues had a subordinate use in the church of God, as an evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God. Moreover, it was a reserve of power, liable to be brought into active use at any time by the scattering of the church through persecution. For these reasons, and also to show that he writes in a spirit of generous good-will, Paul expresses a wish that all the churches in Corinth might be endowed with this gift. But, as a more practical wish, he prefers that they shall be able to prophesy, since the church would not be edified by the use of the gift of tongues, unless the foreign language used was interpreted. If Paul came to them as a visitor or missionary. His profit to them would not lie in his speaking with tongues (even though he, a Jew, spake to them miraculously in their own Greek language); but it would lie in the subject matter of his utterance, in the edification which he conveyed. So, the point of importance is; Prophesying, edifies the

church. This is the subject of this short treatise.

Let us continue with the word as Paul used it. He continues the case in verse twelve. Verse 12 reads: *"Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."* Notice the admonition here to "excel to the edifying." Excel, is defined by Vines Dictionary from the word *perisseuo*, to be over and above. Further understanding of this meaning is derived from the definition "abundance" (another English rendering of the same word). Abundance is defined as: "An exceeding measure, something above the ordinary." It is used four times, three by Paul, and one by James. At Romans 5:17 of abundance of grace; At 2 Corinthians 8:2 of abundance of joy; at 2 Corinthians 10:15 of the extension of the Apostle's sphere of service through the practical fellowship of the saints at Corinth. In James 1:21 it is rendered, metaphorically "overflowing," A.V. "superfluity" with references to wickedness. It is clear what Paul desired of the Corinthian brethren. They were to put forth every effort to edify one another in their assemblies and Christian living.

At verse 17 we read. *"For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified."* At verse 12, Paul begins another argument for the proper and orderly use of the spiritual gifts. His conclusion is that if one cannot understand the various parts of the worship, he cannot be edified. Again, edification of the church is the theme of the apostle's discussion in First Corinthians 14, and the subject of this treatise.

The last verse in which a form of the word edify is used is verse twenty-six. It is this verse that will occupy the main force of the rest of the discussion on "edifying the church." Paul, states here, *"Let all things be done to the edifying."* The church, made up of human creatures subject to discouragement, a devastating human weakness suffered by all members

at one time or the other, certainly needs constant and earnest edification. Inspiration makes the sphere wherein the church is to be edified explicit. Consider the following:

Preaching Must Edify

Preaching will be considered separate from teaching, though both are done in a public fashion. There is a difference that needs to be taken into account. Preaching is that public proclamation of God's word to a mixed audience. How this is to be done is defined by Paul at 2 Timothy 4:1-4; It reads,

¹"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

This passage list four point's that are pertinent to Bible preaching. They are: 1) It is a charge from God. 2) It is to be done in and out of season. 3) There is reproofing and rebuking involved. 4) Exhortation and longsuffering are to be exercised. Peter admonishes preachers that if they speak, "*to speak as the oracles of God*" (1 Peter 4:11).

Preaching that follows the rules set forth by apostolic teaching will no doubt edify. Returning to the assigned text, we discover that Paul spoke concerning the importance of preaching that could be understood. Prophesying is preaching. The word

propheteuo, meaning to be a prophet, to prophesy, is used with the primary meaning of telling forth the Divine counsels. It is used in 1 Corinthians 14:1. He emphasized more than once, using obvious illustrations, that the hearer was to understand and be edified.

The church receives its strength from the bread of heaven or word of God. The power of the word to edify is decreased when the preacher preaches something other than the word as 2 Timothy 4:2 teaches. It is the word that builds up, educates the Christian to his/her error, and instructs on how to correct that error (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3). Preaching must be such that it edifies one to live according to the will of the Father in heaven.

Singing Must Edify

Singing, as described in New Testament, is not entertainment, though it brings joy to the heart of the believer. The purpose of singing is found within the instructions given concerning it. Observe and consider the passages where it is mentioned. 1) *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (Eph. 5:19). *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”* (Col. 3:16). Notice that both of these passages teach emphatically that singing comes from the heart of the worshiper. It is a melody that flows from the heart of the believer outward to the ears of others, teaching and admonishing them. It is directed toward one another and to the Lord.

Teaching and admonishing will edify if done in the spirit of love. Now, put with these the passage found in the text under discussion. ¹⁵*“What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with*

the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. ¹⁶Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest" (1 Cor. 14:15-16)?

The believer is to teach and admonish with UNDERSTANDING! Otherwise, his singing is vain and accomplishes nothing. This rules out any form of making melody that cannot be understood by those in the room. Humming would fit this category as well as instruments of music. While it may be true that you might be able to name the song being hummed or played, there will be others who cannot, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:15,16. Therefore, for singing to edify, it must be understood. In addition, singing must consist of those songs conducive to spiritual edification. Paul lists these in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. He calls them psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. This would eliminate secular songs, that while being joyful and uplifting and no offense to God, would not be suitable for the worship assembly. To edify the church, the singing must conform to inspired teaching.

Teaching Must Edify

Teaching, as mentioned before, will be dealt with in a different fashion than preaching because while both are teaching, there is a need here to approach them differently. In this discussion, teaching is that which is done in a class room setting. Teachers are a part of the organization of the church according to Paul in Ephesians 4:11-13.

¹¹"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹²For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for

the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Teachers must consider the edification of their presentation when preparing for the class, whether it is a Sunday morning or Wednesday night class. Often people will not attend a class or will request a transfer to another, not because the teacher does not know his subject, but because of the presentation. Teaching in the class rooms should be more than moving from verse to verse with a brief exegesis of each. It must edify, provoke thought and excite the interest of the student.

James, in discussing teachers stated: *"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation"* (James 3:1). James is saying that not everyone can, or ought to be a teacher. Those who teach in the church's education program should be well grounded and qualified men and women. In short, they are specialists! They are faithful Christians first, then teachers. If they are not faithful Christians, their teaching influence will be minimum to say the least.

Teaching must edify for a number of reasons but especially for the educating and promoting faithful living of those who gather to hear. This writer feels strongly that the reason we loose many of our people to the world and liberalism is the failure of the teaching process beginning in nursery class. Liberalism and the world become more attractive to those who are bored and/or uneducated in the scriptures. To fall away is more likely. Teaching must edify and educate, providing a strong base for the Christian to draw from when faced with the temptation in the world!

Order Of Worship Must Edify

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). God will not accept that which is not in spirit and in truth. Neither will he accept that which is not decent and in order. The apostle's admonition reads. *"Let all things be done decently and in order"* (1 Cor. 14:40). It is clear that, not only must our worship be in spirit and truth, it must be decent and orderly to be pleasing to God. What did the apostle mean "decently and in order?" According to *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the word "decently" means gracefully, becomingly, in a seemly manner. In 1 Corinthians 14, it contrasts the disorder of oral testimony in the churches. Order, is from the Greek word meaning, an arranging, arrangement, order...to arrange or draw up in order...of due order, in contrast to confusion in the gatherings of a local church. From this we get the order of our worship such as the singing, then prayer, teaching and communion. Notice that decently and in order did not outline the acts of worship in any specific way. Therefore, it is the option of the leaders within the local congregation to determine the order of their worship and to change this order as they deem necessary.

While we can now understand the precept of decently and in order, we should be able to see that there are acts that would be forbidden by the apostle's admonition. As already addressed, the preaching, singing, teaching and prayers should edify, so should the order in the way they are done. Note the following passage, then consider some remarks for consideration. *"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints"* (1 Cor. 14:33).

If the congregation is entering the segment of worship wherein they sing, but the song leader is not

present and a last minute substitution is made, with no pre-selection and planning, how edifying will the singing be? Will there be confusion? Suppose that this is done for the Sunday morning class, how edifying will the teaching be? Let's look at some other areas. If the worship has no order at all, no thought has been given to the singing, how many songs, who will lead, at what point during the worship will it be done? There would be no edification, and it would certainly be confusing.

In light of the thoughts just mentioned, one must at least question the scripturalness of preforming two acts of worship at the same time. In our brotherhood, there is a practice among some who sing a song while passing the bread and fruit of the vine. While this may be stimulating to some, it is confusing and distracting to others. Where is the command, implication, or apostolic example of such ever taking place in New Testament worship? This writer knows of none. Therefore, to practice such would be a violation of the text we have been discussing.

Final Thoughts On Edifying The Church

One of the divine purposes of the church is to edify its members. To do this, there must be a strict application of inspired precepts pertaining to the worship and work of the church. In Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 14, he touches upon many aspects of this important precept. Note that he mentions the various gifts and the aspirations of those who possessed them. His conclusion found in verse thirty-three suggests some important points. 1) The goal of worship is to edify the body. 2) It does not matter who possesses the greatest talent but that that talent is utilized for the common good of all. 3) The using of, or promoting of one's abilities to the discouragement or antagonizing of another is sin. 4) To hinder one from using his/her talent to the fullest is sinful. The

conclusion then is, when the church comes together, there is to be the environment that would bring joy and uplifting to all present. Any alteration of the divine instructions of Christian worship, any additions, or unchristian attitude of the worshipers will hinder the purpose of worship.

May God bless the church in its edification of all to better and more glorious service.

Chapter 7

The Weak Brother

Romans 14:1-5

Jim Blankenship

¹"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. ²For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ³Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. ⁴Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. ⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:1-5, KJV).

¹"But him that is weak in faith receive ye, (yet) not for decision of scruples (i.e. .04 of an ounce in measures. JB) ²One man hath faith to eat all things: but he that is weak eateth herbs. ³Let not him that eateth set at nought him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. ⁴Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be made to stand; for the Lord hath power to make him stand. ⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every

day (alike). Let each man be fully assured in his own mind" [Rom. 14:1-5, ASV].

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" [Gal. 6:10].

"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35].

"And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb" [Rom. 4:19].

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" [Rom. 8:3].

"And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died" [1 Cor. 8:11]?

"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" [1 Cor. 11:30].

"I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, [I speak foolishly,] I am bold also" [2 Cor. 11:21].

"Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not" [2 Cor. 11:29]?

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” [2 Cor. 12:10].

“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” [James 5:14].

Definitions

“WEAK” as defined by W. E. Vines is from the original Greek, *“adulates,”* literally means, “not powerful,” is translated “weak” in Rom. 15:1, of the infirmities of those whose scruples arise through lack of faith [14:22,23], in the same sense as the first, the change in the adjective [14:1] is due to the contrast with *dunatoi*, the “strong,” who have not been specifically mentioned as such in chapter 14.¹

“FAITH,” according to Vines also, is defined as, 1) conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the New Testament of a conviction or belief respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. Relating to God: the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. Relating to Christ: a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, c) the religious beliefs of Christians, d) belief with the predominate idea of trust [or confidence] whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same.²

“RECEIVE” — Vines defines from the Greek, *“proslambano,”* meaning to take to, to take in addition, to take to oneself; [a] to take as one’s companion; b) to take by the hand in order to lead aside; c) to take

or receive into one's home, with the collateral idea-of kindness (Eph. 4:28; d) to receive, that is, to grant one access to one's heart; to take into friendship and intercourse; e) to take to oneself, to take, that is, food.³

"NOT" is defined by Vines as a primary particle of qualified negation; [adverbially] not, [conjunctionally] lest; also (as an interrogative implying a negative answer.⁴

Vines defines "DOUBTFUL" from the Greek, "*dialogismos*" as a deliberating, questioning about what is true; hesitation, doubting b) disputing, arguing.⁵

Joseph Henry Thayer defines "DISPUTATIONS" (KJV) or "SCRUPLES" (ASV) from the Greek, "*diakrisis*," meaning a distinguishing, a discerning, a judging.⁶

Vines defines "DESPISE," from the Greek, "*exoutheneo*," "to make of no account;" "to regard as nothing, to despise utterly, to treat with contempt." This is usually translated to "set at nought," in Luke 18:9, (RV, KJV), "despised." So in Rom. 14:3. Both have "set at nought" in Luke 23:11; Acts 4:11; Rom. 14:10. Both have "despise" in 1 Cor. 16:11; Gal. 4:14, and I Thess. 5:20; in 2 Cor. 10:10, RV, "of no account," for KJV, "contemptible;" in 1 Cor. 1:28, KJV and RV, "despised."⁷

Thayer defines "LET" from the Greek "*krino*" as "to judge" (a) to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong; to be judged, that is, summoned to trial that one's case may be examined and judgment passed upon it; b) to pronounce judgment, to subject to censure, used of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others.⁸

Thayer defines "GOD" from the Greek "*theos*" as the Godhead, the trinity a) God the Father, the first Person in the trinity b) Christ, the second Person of the trinity c) Holy Spirit, the third Person in the

trinity; spoken of the only and true God; d) refers to the things of God; e) His counsels, interests, things due to Him; whatever can in any respect be likened unto God, or resemble Him in any way, God's representative or viceregent.⁹

"SERVANT" is defined by Thayer from the Greek, "*oiketes*" as one who lives in the same house as another, spoken of all who are under the authority of one and the same householder, a servant, a domestic.¹⁰

"MASTER" in the Greek, "*kurios*" is defined by Thayer as he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding; master, lord (a) the possessor and disposer of a thing; (1) the owner; one who has control of the person, the master (2) in the state: the sovereign, prince, chief, the Roman emperor; b) is a title of honor expressive of respect and reverence, with which servants salute their master; c) this title is given to: God, the Messiah.¹¹

"God is able to make him stand" from the Greek "*histemi*." Thayer defines as 1) to cause or make to stand, to place, to put, to set; (a) to bid to stand by, [set up] (1) in the presence of others, in the midst, before judges, before members of the Sanhedrin; 2) to place: b) to make firm, to fix, to establish (1) to cause a person or a thing to keep his or its place; (2) to stand, be kept intact (of family, a kingdom), to escape in safety; (3) to establish a thing, to cause it to stand, to uphold or sustain the authority or force of anything c) to set or place in a balance to weigh: money to one (because in very early times before the introduction of coinage, the metals used to be weighed) (2) to stand (a) to stand by or near; to stop, to stand still, to stand immovable, to stand firm, used of the foundation of a building b) to stand; (1) to continue safe and sound, to stand unharmed, to stand ready or prepared (2) to be of a steadfast mind; (3) used of quality, one who does not hesitate, who does not waiver.¹²

"DAY" as defined by Thayer from the Greek, "*hemera*" is (1) the day, used of the natural day, or the interval between sunrise and sunset, as distinguished from and contrasted with the night (a) in the daytime; b) metaphorically, "the day" is regarded as the time for abstaining from indulgence, vice, crime, because acts of the sort are perpetrated at night and in darkness; (2) used of the civil day, or the space of 24 hours (thus including the night); Eastern usage of this term differs from our western usage. Any part of a day is counted as a whole day, hence the expression "three days and three nights" does not mean literally three whole days, but at least one whole day plus part of two other days. (3) of the last day of this present age, the day Christ will return from heaven, raise the dead, hold the final judgment, and perfect his kingdom; (4) used of time in general, that is, the days of his life.¹³

"PERSUADED" is from the Greek "*plerophoreo*" which Thayer defines to bear or bring full, to make full; (a) to cause a thing to be shown to the full; to fulfill the ministry in every part; b) to carry through to the end, to accomplish things that have been accomplished; c) to fill one with any thought, conviction, or inclination (1) to make one certain, to persuade, to convince one; (2) to be persuaded, to be fully convinced or assured; (3) to render inclined or bent on.¹⁴

Thayer defines "MIND" from the Greek, "*nous*" as 1) the mind, comprising alike the faculties of perceiving and understanding and those of feeling, judging, determining a) the intellectual faculty, the understanding; b) reason in the narrower sense, as the capacity for spiritual truth, the higher powers of the soul, the faculty of perceiving divine things, of recognizing goodness and of hating evil; c) the power of considering and judging soberly, calmly and impartially; (2) a particular mode of thinking and judging, that is, thoughts, feelings, purposes, desires.¹⁵

Who Is The Weak Brother?

Every congregation of the Lord's people have those among us who are spiritually as well as physically weak [i.e. not strong.] If one is born into our physical family with some infirmity or birth defect, we can't send them back where they came from, we have to accept them as they are and give them all the help we can to overcome their handicap.

We have all known brethren through the years who may be handicapped mentally but know enough to become Christians. They need our help. Everyone is not a genius. Everyone is not elder material, or preacher material, or teacher material. We are all different and we must accept each other as just that [Matthew 25].

Joseph S. Exell notes, Paul

“has just been discussing the neighborly character of Christians living, and showing that the Christ-like soul will love his neighbor as himself, and do no ill to his neighbor. And this leads by an easy transition to the whole class of weak consciences, and how they are to be dealt with. For there are people painfully scrupulous, who have come, for example, to fancy that vegetarianism is the only lawful system of diet; or to fancy that holy days ought to be strictly kept; and there is a terrible temptation for strong-minded people to judge harshly the weaker brethren, and so to bring about endless friction in the church and our private lives. Differences of opinion upon non-essentials must not break up the brotherly feeling; and Paul shows with wonderful power where the safety lies. It is in the assertion of Christ's Lordship over the conscience.

"We are all creatures of association, and so some of these early Christians came to think that meat which had been offered to an idol was thereby polluted, and so unfit for Christian use. Not knowing, therefore, where the meat offered for sale in the shambles had previously been, and naturally suspecting that it may have been in the idol's temple they thought it prudent to become strict vegetarians, rather than run the risk of defilement. They would not touch, taste, or handle flesh-meat, but confined themselves to vegetables. Others had no such scruples, but ate whatever was laid before them, asking no questions for consciences sake. Paul regards the scrupulous vegetarians as weaker in conscience than the Christian who allowed none of these scruples to affect him. Again, some were scrupulous about holy days, new moons and set feasts, characteristic of paganism as well as Judaism, claimed regard from weak and uncertain consciences; while others of stronger make regarded all days alike.

"There is a great temptation in the strong to ridicule the weak (and we're all guilty.) The strong are tempted to despise the weak, to judge and ridicule their scruples; and if there is not watchfulness, there will be constant friction between them. Now, this is a menace to the peace of the church; and Paul has here to guard against it. There is a great danger in the indulgence of scorn. A weak brother, if "roasted" and ridiculed by the stronger, may be made a burden to himself, and his personal peace be sacrificed on the altar of his neighbor's criticism. Hence Paul argues:

"1. There should be as little controversy as possible within the church because the weak brother is to be received, but not to

doubtful disputations. He is not to be involved in profitless disputes and the church is wise which discourages debates between brethren.

"2. There should be mutual respect for conscientious difference of opinion. If each man is fully persuaded in his own mind, as Paul declares he ought to let the weak brother admit that his less scrupulous brother has reached his opinion before God, and that God is the only competent Judge of his conduct, which while the strong brother is to give the weak one credit for similar conscientiousness. It is a great matter gained if each lays his brother's case before the Lord, and prays that God will enable him to stand. It is a great thing gained when we are able to see guilt in contemptuous judgment."¹⁶

What Makes Him Weak?

Dr. Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr. says,

"A third element in the human personality involves the basic direction a person chooses for himself. Scripture often speaks of the heart of man. The Greek word '*kardia*' is used in so many different ways that it is difficult to assign to it one central meaning. Literally, of course, it refers to the chief organ of physical life. Scripture teaches that, '...the life of the flesh is in the blood' (Lev. 17:11) and the heart fulfills the function of keeping the body supplied with a life-giving supply of blood. Vine states that, 'By an easy transition the word came to stand for man's entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and emotional elements. In other words, the heart is used figuratively, for the hidden springs of the personal life.'

"Underlying wrong thinking in the unconscious mind is the fact that the human personality as a whole is headed in the wrong direction. Apart from God's sovereign work, people ultimately are out for themselves. All of their capacities [rationality, moral judgment, emotions, will] working together move toward the sinful goal of self-exaltation: 'I want to serve me; I want what I want and when I want it; I want things the way I like.' If the heart is a broad term including our entire personal nature and if it does refer to the '...hidden springs of our personal life,' then perhaps the heart as used in Scripture is that essential part of the person which chooses his basic direction in life. Said in another way, I am suggesting the heart represents a person's fundamental intentions: for whom or what do I choose to live?

"Someone has said that when the range of possible answers to a question has been carefully thought through, it becomes rather narrow. From a biblical perspective, there really are only two possible basic directions which one may choose: live for self or live for God [Matt. 6:24.] If with your heart you choose to live for self (which we all naturally do), then you will never have your personal needs fully met. By cutting God off (what a staggering concept of freedom—mere human can cut God off from their lives), you cut off the only source of true significance and security. You then are left to yourself and so you do the best you can in meeting your personal needs. You may sift through the options available within the world, and perhaps with the help of a therapist, reject some of the more obviously neurotic ones (for example, I will be secure only if everyone likes me all the

time), but you will not find an option that will fully and completely satisfy your needs. Without bringing God into the picture you are left with selecting from the various alternatives supplied by the devil through a false world system (i.e. when one evaluates a certain event influenced by Satan, the world and wrong teaching, his basic direction is to serve self).

“If, however, your basic intentions is...to put Christ first and to serve Him, then you can reject all of the world’s ideas on how to become worthwhile (and good riddance to them—none of them work) and you can start filling your conscious mind with the truths of Scripture. When I was teaching this concept to a group recently, without forethought I shouted that we must ‘Fill our nous with biblical truths’ (i.e. with the conscious mind one will evaluate any situation based upon Bible teaching and put Christ first and not self, therefore bringing about genuine happiness because we know we are serving God not self [Matt. 6:33]).

“Rather than eliminating self, this person has understood that one is to lose self in Christ. ‘Not my will, but thine’ (Luke 22:42); I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me’ (Gal 2:20); ‘Whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it’ (Matt. 16:25); ‘that in all things He might have the preeminence’ (Col. 1:18). Now there are two sources of input into the conscious mind: what Satan says through the world to our unconscious mind and what God says through the Bible to our conscious mind. If the individual’s propositional response to events still draws from his unconsciously held wrong assumptions, he will

function no more effectively than the unbeliever. But, if he renews his mind by evaluating events from a Biblical perspective, he will become a transformed person. When the event of disapproval presents itself, he will make himself say on the authority of Scripture, 'My security and significance as a person depend only upon my relationship to Christ. Although I don't enjoy this rejection at all, still my worth as a person is untouched. Therefore this event is painful but not devastating. I know God can work for good through this difficult event so I can keep going, trust Him, respond Biblically, and not crumble.'¹⁷

Dr. Crabb quotes Carl Rogers as telling us to take

"ten steps backward by minimizing what a person thinks and focusing on his feelings. The phrase 'emotional problem' reflects this emphasis on the feeling world of a person." Rogers does not believe that in order to help a troubled person one need do more than help a person assimilate his feelings (and he means literal visceral, not cognitions.) Whenever untrained, well-meaning people try to counsel, the first thing they do is ask, "How do you feel?" The question is all right but what do you do with the answer, "I feel lousy?" Rogerian types would respond with "You feel pretty low today." When the client then offers, "Yes, I really do. Can you help me?" the consistent mirroring counselor might reply, "You hope that I can be of help to you."¹⁸

Is It All Right For Us To Hold Different Views?

In matters of opinion, Robertson L. Whiteside says,

“This weakness in faith consisted in doubts as to the propriety of eating meat, and not in the truth that Jesus is the Christ. Many Jewish Christians held that the law of Moses was still in force. They could not always be sure that the meat bought in the market was not from an animal which the law declared unclean, nor could they be sure that it had not been dedicated to an idol. They therefore ate herbs [NOTICE: they didn’t take any chances, jb] Others had faith to eat any kind of meat. The sticklers for the law would brand the others as sinners, and themselves be condemned by the others as foolish. Neither would be willing to give the other full fellowship; each would question the other’s scruples or lack of scruples (*diakrisis*—a distinguishing, a discerning, a judging.) So long as one’s faith in Christ is strong and unwavering, no one should condemn him for what he eats or does not eat; but no one should try to force others to comply with his notions about eating or not eating. No servant has a right to condemn another man’s servant; his standing or falling is entirely between him and his lord. And so it is with our Lord and his servants. For one; to condemn the Lord’s servant does not change the Lord’s attitude toward him. The Lord is able to make his stand, so long as his opinions do not interfere with his faith or obedience, or he does not try to force his opinions on others.”¹⁸

In matters of faith it is not true. As Whiteside also says on verses five and six.

"The Sabbath was not the only day set apart in the law of Moses for the children of Israel to observe. Many Jewish Christians still held that the law was binding and demanded that Gentile Christians also keep the law. The decrees of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem had no effect on some of them, as Paul's letters abundantly show. Such men would not only be contentious about eating meat, but would demand that Gentile Christians observe the days set apart in the law. In Paul's discussion of these matters of opinion, the Lord's appointments were not included. The Lord has set apart the Lord's day for worship; its observance is therefore not a matter of opinion or indifference. "Let each man be fully assured in his own mind" as to whether he will or will not devote any other day to study, meditation, and prayer. Concerning this the Lord has bound no one, and concerning such matters no one should seek to bind his notions on others. It is therefore evident that the leaders of a church could not adopt these Jewish holidays and demand that all the members observe them. The Judaizing teachers had not got in their work among the churches of Galatia, which led Paul to say, "Ye observe days and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain" [Gal. 4:10-11]. If leaders should set any such days to be observed by the church, the members should not submit to such an arrangement. "Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day" [Col. 2:16]."¹⁹

Dr. Crabb goes on to say about man's will,

"In addition to the conscious mind, the unconscious mind, and the heart, people have a capacity for choosing how they behave. Any concept of personal functioning which left out the will would be incomplete. The New Testament has at least two root words (*boule* and *thelema*) which convey the notion of choice. People generally choose to do what makes sense to them. In other words, perceptions or evaluations about life (what one tells himself in his conscious mind) determine the range of behavior within which people choose to perform. A person's freedom of choice is restricted by the limits of his rational understanding. The thorny issue of free will must be discussed with an awareness of the fact that people choose to do only what they understand to be sensible. For example, the problem with an unsaved person is not allowing his will to make that choice. He does not need a strengthened will; he needs an enlightened mind (i.e. with the Bible j.b.), and that is the work of the Holy Spirit (i.e. through the Scriptures j.b.).

"Preachers and counselors can spend their energy exhorting people to change their behavior. But the human will is not a free entity. It is bound to a person's understanding. People will do what they believe. Rather than making a concerted effort to influence choices, preachers first need to be influencing minds. When a person understands who Christ is, on what basis He is worthwhile, and what life is all about, he has the formulation necessary for any sustained change in life style. Christians who try to "live right" without correcting a wrong understanding about

how to meet personal needs will always labor and struggle with Christianity, grinding out their responsible duty in a joyless strained fashion. Christ taught that when we know the truth, we can be set free. We now are free to choose the life of obedience because we understand that in Christ we now are worthwhile persons. We are free to express our gratitude in the worship and service of the One who has met our needs. "It must be stressed that obedience does not automatically follow from correct understanding. Remember, I said that our perceptions determine the range of options we can choose. The will is a real part of the human personality with the function of responsibility choosing to behave consistently with how the Bible teaches us to evaluate our world. And such choices are not always easy. It often involves teeth-grinding effort to choose to behave as we should ... As the Christian continues to choose the path of righteousness, his capacity for right choices in the face of adversity and temptation enlarges. He becomes a stronger Christian, on whom God can trust with greater responsibility."²⁰

How Can We Deal With The Weak Brother On The Local Level?

A. Kenneth Chaffin [one of my uncles by marriage] said long ago, "You have to teach them the truth and let them make up their own mind [Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:28]."

B. What Is The Church's Responsibility To The Weak Brother?

The duty of the weak:

"The weaker man had his scruples; his strong judgments as to this or that mode of outward living being right, and this or that wrong. And he was quick to condemn the man whose opinions and practices were unlike his own. He has another Master. Certainly he has yielded himself to Christ, and Christ must measure the fidelity of his service. If faithful, he abides as a servant; if unfaithful, he falls. But he shall not fall. The heart is right, and even if the freedom of outward observance were a mistaken freedom, Christ is not such a Master as to cast him off for a mistake. No, 'he shall be made to stand.' Is not this the determining principle of the Christian life? ... It matters nothing comparatively determining whether we eat or do not eat, whether we observe days or not, whether we live or die: 'none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself' (Rom 14:7.) The aim of the whole life is Christ-wards, and the aim, not the details, determines the life. He has another Judge. This follows from the former. If Christ be the Master, now, He shall judge the service itself at the last. And if we may not measure the fidelity of another's servant, neither may we pass sentence on his deeds. No; 'the day shall declare it, and the fire shall try every-man's work of what sort it is' (I Cor. 3:13.) For it is true that the details of the life will be taken into account, but not by our brethren: 'Each one of us shall give account of himself to God' (2 Cor 5:10; Eccl. 12:13-14)."²⁰

The Duty Of The Strong

Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* We need to

go in the spirit of love; show them tender loving care; ask to help; pray for them; let them know you care and love them.

So, then, the weak are warned not to judge the men of liberty; and the men of liberty, men of strength as they thought themselves, are to show their strength by gentleness, and their liberty by self-sacrifice. For the conscience of the weak, if erring, was to be respected, and neither were they to be grieved by a needless exhibition of the liberty of the strong, nor above all led to sin against their convictions by the example or ridicule of the preponderant party.

1. *"They were not to be grieved.* Could the stronger ones ruthlessly cause pain to the scrupulous ones by their own seeming unscrupulousness? That was not walking in love. And for the sake of showing that they could eat meat! Away the thought: this was not God's kingdom. Let them rather know that, eating or not eating, to respect the rights of others, to have peace with all, and to rejoice with a common joy in God — this was God's kingdom. So also would their spirit commend itself to men and to God. Christians then indeed; as Christ died for the weaker ones, so they sacrificed their liberty for them.

2. *"They were not to be made to fall.* Let them know that, innocent as their eating of flesh might be, it was not innocent to the doubting man, and each one's conscience must approve his own deeds, or he is condemned. Nay, he falls! Oh, surely, they were not prepared for that? For this was, not merely to destroy the weak brother's peace and charity of heart, but to overthrow the word of God in him! And to yourself, have all tender solicitude for your weak brother's conscience. They receive the brother, care for him, sacrifice your freedom for him. For while faith, liberty, strength, are good, the best of all is love!" [p.419 PC VOL. XVIII]

Examples Of Weak Brethren And What Did We Do With Them?

A. Simon of Samaria [Acts 8:5-12, 18-24]:

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. ⁶And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city. ⁹But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before-time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: ¹⁰To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. ¹¹And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. ¹²But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. ... ¹⁸And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, ¹⁹Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. ²⁰But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. ²¹Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. ²²Repent therefore of this thy wicked-

ness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. ²³For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. ²⁴Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."

B. Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:1-10]:

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ²And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? ⁴While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. ⁵And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. ⁶And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. ⁷And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. ⁸And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. ⁹Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. ¹⁰Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband."

C. Fornicator [1 Cor. 5:1-13]:

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. ²And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. ³For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, ⁴In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? ⁷Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: ⁸Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: ¹⁰Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. ¹¹But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. ¹²For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? ¹³But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

D. John Mark (Acts 12:12): *"And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying."* Acts 12:25, *"And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark."* Acts 13:5, *"And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister."* Acts 13:13, *"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem."* Acts 15:37-41, *"And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. ³⁸But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. ³⁹And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; ⁴⁰And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. ⁴¹And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."* Col. 4:10, *"Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, [touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;]." Philemon 1:24, "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers."* 2 Tim. 4:11, *"Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."* 1 Peter 5:13, *"The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son."*

E. Diotrephes (3 John 9-11): *"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. ¹⁰Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious*

words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. ¹¹Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good."

F. Onesimus (Philemon 1:10-22): "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: ¹¹Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: ¹²Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: ¹³Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: ¹⁴But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. ¹⁵For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; ¹⁶Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? ¹⁷If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. ¹⁸If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; ¹⁹I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. ²⁰Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. ²¹Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say. ²²But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you."

G. Sidney Blankenship (my daddy) was born in Tennessee, February 7, 1921, the eldest of eight children. His parents were faithful Christians. He was brought up in the church but never obeyed the Gospel until about 1950 after a tour of duty with Uncle Sam for better than three years in the South Pacific. As far back as I can remember our church life

in growing up was hap-hazard. We would attend the "big meeting" every year and especially if they were going to have a picnic at Garfield Park. From the time he was baptized it wasn't many years before he and mother became unfaithful.

In 1956, Daddy had a nervous breakdown as a result of his tour of duty in the South Pacific. The doctor recommended fresh air and sunshine to cure all his ills but it didn't eliminate the problem. Daddy was never the same happy man that he was before 1956. The doctor's advise coupled with his parents retirement put us all on a farm in Tennessee. The church became a part of our family life once again. Daddy would wait on the table or pass communion but that was the extent of his participation in worship services. Within two or three years someone said something to hurt his feelings and then the "ox was always in the ditch" on Sunday morning. This went on until 1966 when Daddy, Mother and their four youngest children moved back to Indianapolis.

In 1979, Daddy had a heart attack which put him to thinking about his soul's salvation. He knew better than to waste his life the way he had for 17 years. He had not been to worship services at all unless I was doing the preaching. He was soon restored while my brother-in-law, Ben Flatt, was in a meeting at South Keystone. The family soon began attending worship and Bible study at West Lake which was near where they lived at the time. Brother John Hoover was able to encourage Daddy and get him involved in the work of the church as he had never been before. Things went well until West Lake changed preachers and got a "Crossroads" preacher in the pulpit, and discouraged Daddy and he quit again. This rocked on until 1989 when two of his brothers talked to him trying to get him back in the church. Shortly thereafter I wrote him a letter encouraging the same. In December of that year Daddy and Mother came to see us in Berry, Alabama. Mother asked me not to say anything to

Daddy about the church because it would only make matters worse. So I didn't, but his favorite daughter-in-law, Nancy, had a chance to talk to him one-on-one while they were visiting with us that month. Mother had continued to attend West Lake and only kept the problem with the preacher agitated in Daddy's mind. Nancy was able to help to reconcile their differences while they were with us in Alabama and they both were restored to the fellowship of the Lord's church during that visit.

I discouraged them from going to West Lake and the alternative at the time seemed to be South Central where my younger sister and her family go. That was short lived because Daddy got sick. He had surgery April 1, 1990 and was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer which was also wide spread. Only six weeks later he "died in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13).

You see why I'm especially concerned with weak brethren. How should we treat them? Like everyone of them were our own Daddy, terminally ill. If you had a child born into your family with some birth defect, would you have them destroyed because they were physically weak? When someone in our family gets injured leaving them crippled for life, do we have them destroyed just because they are less than perfect? If you were in my shoes, would you want your Daddy to die and go to Hell without someone saying and doing all they could to get him back in a right relationship with God? The soul you save could be your Dad or Mother or husband, or wife, or children or grandchildren. Don't give up, they need our help desperately. Sometimes they simply don't know how to ask.

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Chapter 8

Bearing The Infirmities Of The Weak

Romans 15:1-5

Raymond Allen Hagood

There is a popular trend among many affluent yuppies in our society. When they get a divorce, they send their children to special psychologists whose job it is to convince these young people that divorce is a normal part of life and that they should not have bad feelings toward their parents, because, after all, neither of those parents were responsible for the break-up. This is all part of a "no-fault" concept concerning divorce. These psychologists are paid by the parents to work everything out to make divorce as painless as possible for the parents, not the children. The therapy is not really for the children, but for the parents.

They have all of their artificial reasons concerning why divorce is a good thing. For example, they say that divorce is good, because it is not good for children to live in a stressful home. They also have artificial language for artificial feelings, in order to accomplish their sworn mission of destroying feelings of guilt and the idea that anybody is responsible for anything that they may do in life.

In our "no-fault" society, no one is really responsible for any sin or failure. It is always the fault of someone else or something else if one fails. The alcoholic is not responsible, because alcoholism is an illness. The mass murderer is mentally disturbed. The thief is disadvantaged.

Yet the Bible requires individual responsibility to self and individual responsibility to others. Paul commands, "*For every man shall bear his own burden*" (Gal. 6:5). Further, Paul says, "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*" (Gal. 6:2).

The Greek words translated "burden" in these passages are fascinating. The word "*phortion*" in verse 5 refers to a lighter load, as opposed to the word "burden" in verse 2 (*baros*), which denotes a heavier load.

Paul's point is that we all have individual responsibility that no one can do for us. You cannot obey the Gospel for me, nor can you worship for me or live the Christian life for me.

There are burdens in life, however, that are so heavy that we need help to bear the burden. This is what Galatians 6:2 is discussing.

Robertson has well said concerning verse 2,

"Here it signifies lending a hand to help by lifting heavy loads. This does not involve transference of the burden, for it is said in II Corinthians 8:13, 'I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened,' and in verse 5 it is added that each will have his own pack to bear; but Christian love must ever be careful to relieve each in turn when overtaxed by crushing loads" (A. T. Robertson, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 189).

Romans 15:1-5 discusses the responsibilities that the strong have toward those who are weak. These responsibilities are important because they build up the body of Christ and prevent division and discouragement.

The Conscience

In order to understand Romans 15:1-5, one must comprehend Romans chapter 14. Romans 14 discusses the distinctions between matters of doctrine (obligation) and matters of opinion (indifference). Central to this text is the Bible doctrine of the conscience.

The word "conscience" means "a knowing with one's self, joint knowledge." The definition may be more clearly understood by studying the actions of the conscience described in the Bible.

First, *the conscience convicts one of sin*. John says, "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" [John 8:9].

Second, *the conscience bears witness of us*. Paul declares, "Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" [Rom. 2:15].

When we commit sin, our conscience instantly goes to work urging us to confess that sin and repent of it as quickly as possible. What occurs in our mind is not unlike a miniature courtroom. The conscience convicts us (finds us guilty) of sin. Then it bears witness of us, or another way of saying it is, that it acts as an eyewitness against us. It says, "You are guilty of sin, and you need not deny it, because I saw you commit the sin." The witnessing and convicting process has the effect of making us face our sins and forcing us to do something about them before it is everlastingly too late.

The conscience is very much like a computer. It functions on the information that it possesses and thus is limited in its effectiveness to what it knows. The conscience is only as good as its programming,

and that is the principle reason the conscience is not a safe guide. In spite of the tune that says, "Let your conscience be your guide," every knowledgeable Christian knows that the conscience cannot be a totally safe guide, because it may either be programmed wrong, or it may be lacking in vital information which it needs to function properly.

When the conscience is ignored, it will suffer greatly, because it is not allowed to do its job. There are serious consequences in tampering with the conscience or ignoring the conscience. The conscience can become non-functional. The Bible calls this a hardened heart or a hardened conscience. This is what happened to Pharaoh's heart when he repeatedly disobeyed the word of God (Exodus 7:14).

The conscience is so important to humanity that God has given special laws that are designed to protect the conscience. In fact, Romans 14:23 discusses this very matter when it says, *"And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not faith is sin."*

Paul in this classic text not only discusses how one may sin against the conscience, but he is also discussing how God protects the conscience. What this verse teaches is that if a person does something that he thinks is wrong, even though what he is doing is not actually wrong, then he is committing sin, because he is violating his own conscience. He has sinned, not because the thing that he did was wrong in and of itself, but because he went against his own conscience and thus perpetrated a serious and potentially fatal battery against his conscience. For example, let's say I truly believed it was sinful to wear a black suit. If I wear a black suit, believing that it is wrong to do so, then I commit sin because I violated my conscience. I did not commit sin because wearing a black suit is sinful, but rather because I thought it was wrong and went against my weak conscience.

Not only can I sin against my own weak conscience, but I can also sin against the weak conscience of another, because in matters of indifference the other man's conscience is our guide. For example, instead of my believing that it is wrong to wear a black suit, let's suppose that some other person believes that it is wrong to wear a black suit. If I am aware that this person holds to such a belief and I wear that black suit in spite of that, then I have committed sin, because I have sinned against his weak conscience. We can sin by violating our own conscience and/or by violating the conscience of someone else.

Issues of conscience are limited to matters of indifference and not to matters of doctrine or obligation. A person might come into the worship assembly and make it known that our partaking of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week offends his conscience. Are we then to refrain from observing the Lord's supper in order not to offend his conscience? The answer to that question is "no." Observing the Lord's supper on the first day of the week is not a matter of indifference at all, but, rather, it is a matter of obligation. We cannot disobey God in order to salve a person's conscience. Wearing a black suit is a matter of indifference, but partaking of the Lord's supper is not.

All of these matters are significant, because they help us identify the weak and the strong in Romans 15:1-5.

The Weak and The Strong

In Romans 15, Paul discusses the obligations of the strong toward those who are weak. The only way to understand exactly who the weak and the strong are is to study and understand Romans chapter 14, because this chapter clearly identifies each of these.

Romans 14 is a discussion of matters of indifference and the freedom and restrictions associated with them. In matters of opinion, Christians have freedom to hold to different opinions, as long as those opinions are not in conflict with the word of God. In matters of doctrine, Christians have no such freedom. Christians are simply to obey God's word without addition or subtraction. Unity is based upon two very important factors. First, we must all believe the same thing regarding doctrine and obey that doctrine in its totality. This is exactly what 1 Corinthians 1:10 clearly teaches, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

Second, in matters of opinion we must be careful not to make laws where God has not made laws nor bind where God has not bound. We must honor the freedom that Christians have to disagree in matters of opinion. We must not draw lines of fellowship in such matters, as long as a person is not binding an opinion or is not simply being contentious. In matters of opinion, we can agree to disagree, but in matters of doctrine, we cannot ever agree to disagree.

The "strong" Christian in this text is referring simply to Christians who do not have a weak conscience, who are knowledgeable and strong in the faith.

The "weak" Christian is referring to Christians who do have a weak conscience. These are people who are weak in the faith. They are not people weak in faith, because they may have very strong faith, but because of ignorance concerning a matter or matters, they are weak in these areas. Because he has a deficient knowledge of God's word, he may believe that something is wrong, even though it may not be wrong. Due to the fact that his conscience is weak, he might allow the words or actions of another Christian

to influence him to go against his own conscience and thus sin against his own conscience.

In Romans 14:2, we see a Christian who is weak because his opinions have become so intractable that he is convinced that eating meat is sinful, and so he eats herbs.

The strong Christian knows and understands that eating meat is not sinful. They have read Acts 10:15, 1 Timothy 4:4 and other passages which clearly show that eating meat is perfectly scriptural. In fact, this strong Christian knows that one could eat meat or vegetables. It is not wrong to eat either or both.

In this text, Paul is discussing two concepts that at first appear to be in conflict with one another, but in reality they are not. On one hand, there is one's responsibility to the weak brother, and on the other hand, there is Christian liberty.

Paul commands in Romans 14:13 that if the exercise of our Christian freedom in matters of opinion causes some weak brother to stumble, then we must not exercise our liberty at all. There is something more important than Christian liberty, and that is the soul of a weak brother. Paul offers this warning in 1 Corinthians 8:9, *"But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak."*

Paul further says,

"For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; ¹¹and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? ¹²But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. ¹³Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat

no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" [1 Cor. 8:10-13].

It is important that a person not violate his own conscience by doing a thing that he honestly believes to be wrong. Neither are we to violate the conscience of a weak brother or sister.

We must also be careful not to let our conscience allow what God forbids or condemn what God has not condemned.

In matters of indifference, we must never draw lines of fellowship. God allows diversity of belief and practice in matters of indifference. In spite of our freedom in matters of indifference, we must be very cautious not to offend a weak brother's conscience. We must be willing to give up our Christian liberty for the sake of the souls of weak brethren. This means that we must not only be concerned about whether a thing or practice is right or wrong, but we must also be concerned with the effects that those practices may have on others.

If there is doubt about whether to follow a certain course or do a certain thing, then we should just not do that thing or follow that course. The doubt alone is warning enough of the danger of the situation.

Romans 15:1

Having clearly identified the strong and the weak in this text, we now need to understand other obligations that Christians have toward one another.

The strong are required to bear the infirmities of the weak. The word "bear" (*bastadzo*) means "to put up with patiently." The word "infirmities" means "those scruples which arise through weakness of faith" [W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, p. 257].

Paul is instructing Christians to have a patient tolerance of brethren with weak consciences in

matters of indifference. Christians should love one another so much that they will not allow themselves to destroy the unity of the church over a matter of indifference. Instead of dividing from one another concerning matters of opinion, we should put up with different convictions and tolerate these differences, rather than divide over them.

Paul says that we are not to please ourselves, that is, we are not to selfishly want things our way. We must be selfless brethren who bear with one another in love of the brethren and the unity of the church. Divisions have occurred throughout the brotherhood because of selfish brethren who divide over matters of opinion.

In truth, brethren can hold to strong opinions about matters of indifference without hating one another and dividing over such matters. It is not wrong for brethren to argue for their convictions in optional matters, but they must not divide nor diminish in any way their love for brethren with whom they disagree.

Verse Two

As Christians, we need to be concerned with our neighbors. We are not to please ourselves, but rather we are to please our neighbors. Paul said, *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (Phil. 2:4). The Hebrew writer commands, *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"* (Heb. 10:24).

Bob Taylor was one of the governors of the state of Tennessee in the long ago. He was a tremendous governor and one of the greatest orators ever to live. He was also a great humanitarian who sincerely cared for others. He unselfishly helped the downtrodden and needy. He enacted laws to help the poor and sick. He gave large amounts of money from his own pockets to help those in need. He was loved by the mighty and

the small, because he unselfishly cared for his neighbor, whoever his neighbor was. On the tombstone of Robert Love Taylor, the following epitaph is found:

I would rather have my name written among those who have loved their fellow man than to wear the laurels that encircle the brow of the Iron Prince.

I'd rather sleep in some quiet churchyard, unknown and unremembered, save by those in whose hearts I have scattered seeds of kindness, than to be confined in a sarcophagus of gold with widows and orphans as my monuments and desolate homes as living witnesses of my glory.

Christians, above all others, should be kind and benevolent. We should be concerned at the welfare of everyone, especially those of the household of faith. We should not allow silly differences concerning matters of opinion to divide us.

Pleasing others, however, does have a limit. Paul qualifies this obligation by saying that we are to please our neighbor "for his good to edification." This means that we are to please our neighbor to a point and in a certain way. We are to please him for his spiritual good and his spiritual edification.

We cannot please our neighbor by compromising the truth, because this would not be good for him or for us spiritually. We might have a neighbor that wants us to steal for him or lie for him in order to please him, but we cannot do that either. We cannot ever disobey God to please a brother or sister.

Sadly, there are brethren who are pleased by false teachers, and they are pleased to tolerate these evil people. Other brethren are pleased to support adulterous marriages and other immoral acts. Faithful Christians must please God and fight strongly against

false teachers, unfaithful brethren and immoral people.

We are to please our brethren in matters of indifference, but never in matters of doctrine. A good rule of thumb is this — “In matters of indifference please your neighbor, in matters of obligation please God.”

Verses 3 and 4

The perfect example of unselfish service to others is seen in Christ. The Lord pleased others in order to save the world. In the process of selflessly pleasing others, Christ had to suffer horrible things. Christ certainly did not please himself, but others.

Paul quotes Psalm 69:9 in this verse. This text foretold the terrible reproaches that Christ would endure in order to redeem the world. Christ exemplified fully what it means to endure hardships for the good of others.

If Christ could endure all of these indignities, insults, torture and even death for others, then surely we can tolerate differences of opinion in matters of indifference for the good of others.

Paul quoted from the Old Testament in regard to this matter. In verse four, Paul underscores the importance of the Old Testament in the educational process of Christians. The Old Testament was written for our learning, but it was not written for our law. We learn from the Old Testament, but we are not under the Old Testament law.

The Old Testament teaches us about patience. We learn of the patience of great men like Job, Abraham and Moses. We receive comfort by the consistent presentation of God's providential care of the faithful throughout the ages. We are comforted by God's great love, mercy and grace which fill the pages of the Old Testament. We see God's justice and punishment of the wicked and his preservation of the godly.

All of these form the foundation of our hope, because they demonstrate the true nature of God and His Word. God never lies. God wants humanity to be saved, and he has patiently worked to save mankind. God is love, and that love is extended to all of his creation.

These lessons and hundreds more fill the pages of the Old Testament and show us the nature of our God, thus giving us the kind of faith we need in order to have hope.

Verse 5

Beginning in verse 5 through verse 7, Paul pleads for unity among brethren. Unity is based on being like-minded according to Christ Jesus. We are not to be like-minded in evil or false doctrine, but rather according to Christ.

Paul's plea of 1 Corinthians 1:10 is that we all *"be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* We are all to believe the same doctrine and think the same in regard to that doctrine.

Further, we are all to be like-minded in matters of indifference. We are to honor Christian liberty, while being willing to forfeit that liberty for the good of weak Christians.

Conclusion

Problems come when brethren do not properly distinguish between matters of indifference and matters of obligation. Sometimes people take matters of obligation and try to make them matters of opinion. Song worship to God is a classic example of this very thing. Many view instrumental music in worship as merely a matter of opinion. They believe brethren should not divide over the instrument, but be tolerant toward one another. Nothing could be farther from

the truth. Instrumental music in worship to God has never been an issue of indifference, nor will it ever be. It has always been a doctrinal matter about which brethren must honor and obey the law of God.

Sometimes brethren take a matter of indifference and make it a matter of doctrine. We have all witnessed the anti-ism which divided the church in the 1960s and continues to divide the church today. When brethren make laws that God has not made and bind where God has not bound, they are engaging in a deadly and divisive practice.

Let's all honor God's laws concerning these matters. Let's love each other and the brotherhood and strive for unity based on God's word. Yet, let's not have unity at any price. If unity requires compromise of truth, then the price for unity is too high.

Let's not please ourselves, but rather let's please God and our brethren.

Chapter 9

"Endeavoring To Keep The Unity Of The Spirit In The Bond Of Peace Ephesians 4:3

James W. Boyd

The title is a quotation from Ephesians 4:3 in the context of Paul's inspired instructions to Christians in Ephesus. The Holy Spirit knows that it is important and necessary not only for one to become a Christian, but to be faithful in being that which he has professed to become. Paul writes regarding how a Christian is to "walk," presenting the life of a Christian with the analogy of taking a journey. It is similar to Peter's presentation of brethren as pilgrims and sojourners. *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims..."* [1 Peter 2:11]. We are on a journey from this life to the next. There is a prescribed manner in which we are to make the pilgrimage. Paul not only mentions our "walk" but some of the matters that are involved in making that "walk" in a manner acceptable to God.

As in Philippians 1:27, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ..."*, he urges the brethren in Ephesus to *"walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."* The admonition has to do with the manner of life the Christian is to display. There are many attitudes and actions that are incompatible with being a Christian and if and when we engage in them, we bring reproach and disgrace on the cause of Christ. On the other hand, there is a way of life, a manner of conduct, that is

proper, fitting, respectful of Christ, and it brings glory and honor to the Lord. Paul closed chapter three urging brethren to bring Him glory. Christians have been called by the gospel. *"Whereunto he called you by our gospel..."* [2 Thess. 2:14] to be a follower of the Christ. Therefore, our lives are expected to be becoming to and harmonious with the vocation we have chosen.

There are various qualities that are to be evident in our lives and Paul discusses some of these in this passage. In this lesson we shall focus our attention on the instruction in verse three, noting the immeasurable value and benefit in obeying this teaching.

The Goal Is Unity And Peace

We must pursue these goals because God expects them. In the New Testament we learn He has commanded that His people be united. Any and all commands of God must be obeyed and none are optional. We cannot dismiss the teaching of our text nor ever become indifferent toward the pursuit of unity and peace just because too often it is difficult to attain and maintain. We are dealing with submission to divine authority here. There is to be no schism, division, or dissension among God's people. *"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another"* [1 Cor. 12:25].

Unity and peace is deserving *"for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace..."* [1 Cor. 14:33]. What a misrepresentation of the Almighty to present a divided so-called "Christian" religious world! Christ was prophesied to be named the "Prince of Peace" in Isaiah 9:6. Unfortunately, many do not understand the kind of peace He brought. At His birth the angels sang, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men"* [Luke 2:14]. We shall

learn more fully the kind and quality of the peace of Jesus.

In the New Testament, we read of the unity and peace of the early disciples. Even though the church was composed of Jews, Gentiles, males, females, servants, masters, there was a unity and peace among them. *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). *"But now there are many members but one body"* (1 Cor. 12:20). There was reconciliation between Jew and Gentile in the one body.

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; ¹⁵Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; ¹⁶And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:14-16).

Our Lord prayed for His disciples to be united. *"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me"* (John 17:21). Who could doubt that the religious division among those who profess to follow Christ has provoked infidelity and even atheism? Who could even question that harm is done the cause of Christ by division? Some who claim to be Christian have not even obeyed the Gospel commands whereby one becomes a Christian and they are hopelessly divided into all kinds of denominations. Among those who have obeyed the Gospel, there is often division. Who could deny that such division has retarded the progress of the Gospel? The Lord's church has suffered

because of divisions of one sort or another. Many brethren of the past and present have been guilty of biting and devouring one another to the destruction of the church in their localities. Paul taught against such as this [Gal. 5:15]. Too many have sought something other than unity and peace and have self-destructed. The various hobbies, liberal and legalistic, that have stained the history of the church have been tools in the hands of Satan to capture and control the souls of many.

There is strength and power in unity and peace. When there is in-fighting the attention and resources of brethren are diverted from the spiritual foe of Satan and the warfare to capture the lost from His captivity. While one may easily break many twigs one at a time, when they are tied together they become almost impossible to break. So it is with God's people. When we are united, we are a force with which the world must reckon. In a divided state we are weakened and made near impotent.

The Gospel also produces division of a kind. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, said, *"Think not that I am come to bring peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword"* [Matt. 10:34]. There is no contradiction in Jesus being the Prince of Peace and Him not bringing peace when we understand the kind and the nature of the peace He provides. There has been and always will be a contention between evil and good. There will be division between those who come to the Christ and those who reject Him. This cannot be avoided. There simply cannot be communion and agreement between believers, righteousness, Christ, light, the temple of God with unbelievers, unrighteousness, Belial, infidels, and idols [2 Cor. 6:14-16]. The "gospel of peace" [Eph. 6:15] separates the sheep from the goats [Matt. 25:32]. We must, therefore, conclude that all division is not of itself evil. If division between right and wrong does not exist, something is wrong. But what of division among the

disciples, the sheep, of Christ? Unity and peace among them is the goal of which Paul speaks in our text.

What Is Unity And Peace?

Unity and peace go together. They feed upon each other and nurture one another. Where there is unity there will be peace. Where peace exists there is unity. Scripture admonishes us to unity and peace. 1 Cor. 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* Philippians 1:27, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel."* The prayer of Jesus and our text contend for the same thing. Unity and peace is commanded and division is condemned. Nothing could be plainer than this.

Jesus taught, *"Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand"* (Matt. 12:25). Some mistakenly think Abraham Lincoln coined this concept during the War of Southern Independence, but Christ is the author of this teaching. It was another way He emphasized the necessity of unity and peace among brethren.

Unity is not the same as union. While union will exist in unity, union can exist without unity. The Roman Empire was a powerful union, but unity was not one of its virtues. There was constant war and strife among the provinces of that power. Just putting things together does not produce unity even though a union may exist. One has illustrated that a dog and cat in a sack may be union, but not unity.

Furthermore, the doctrine of unity in diversity is self-contradicting and does not express the unity and peace that is to exist among brethren. There must be unity in those matters where God has spoken. We do well to tolerate diversity in matters of human judgment and opinion, but not matters of doctrine given by inspiration. The idea that unity is to agree to disagree is self-defeating. Some cry, "live, and let live," as if whatever course one follows the benefits will ultimately be the same. Such is contrary to truth. Only the way of the Lord will bring the spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). But it is false to believe that "everything is beautiful in its own way; I'm OK; you're OK." Such an idea nullifies and invalidates the need of man to conform to the will of God.

Unity involves the sameness of character, harmony, and agreement. "*Can two walk together except they be agreed*" (Amos 3:3)? It demands conformity to the same rule, speaking the same things, using the same measure, following the same guide, and standing together because of a common conviction and faith. Organic unity is also involved because the Lord's church is where this unity and peace preside. There is one body which is the church (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:4). Denominationalism is incompatible with the unity and peace for which the Lord calls.

People can be united and be at peace among themselves and still not be pleasing before God. The forces of evil are often very united and present a powerful opposition to the forces of truth. They very often live in peace among themselves. Human churches are often united and at peace. We must realize that the goal of which Paul speaks is unity and peace but of a special kind. Unity and peace of themselves is not the ultimate accomplishment. We can be united and at peace and still remain spiritually lost in sin. We all must learn this truth because some have evidently fallen victim to the idea that if they have unity and are at peace that all is pleasing to God. This

is not necessarily so. We now turn our attention to the special unity and peace under consideration.

Unity Of The Spirit

The phrase, "*unity of the Spirit*," is a possessive phrase like "*the gift of the Holy Spirit*," or "*the doctrine of Christ*." We are concerned with the unity the Spirit produces, gives, provides, and belongs to Him. While we know there is one Spirit (Eph. 4:4), this passage is not making that point, although it is harmonious with it. The Holy Spirit produces the unity and peace that God wants from us by the Word of God that has been revealed and delivered through the Holy Spirit. It is when men follow the same rule of the Holy Spirit, God's Word, and are of the same mind, speak the same things, that they enjoy the unity and peace intended. The Holy Spirit does not say one thing to some and something different to others. This is one reason we can know that all these who claim some direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon them but who send forth diverse messages that contradict one another and the Scriptures are making false claims. That kind of division is the work of men, not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not guide in every direction men may choose to follow.

Men benefit from and enjoy the unity of the Spirit when they keep the Word given by the Holy Spirit, once embodied in inspired men, and now in inspired Scripture. Unity is not the result of compromise, negotiation, or tolerance of each other regardless of what is believed and practiced, but obedience and conformity to "*thus saith the Lord*." Unity is ultimately founded in God's eternal truth and man's acceptance of that truth. Therefore, one primary aim is not merely unity, or possessing peace, but the submission to revealed truth. Truth produces unity and peace. Error and evil disrupt unity and peace. When you learn, believe, obey, and continue to follow

God's truth, and I learn, believe, obey, and continue to follow God's truth, we will be united and be at peace, not only with God, but one another. Should either of us fail in these things, the only consequence we can expect is the very division, dissension, and strife so often observable among us. Paul wrote in Romans 14:19, *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."* The first consideration of "things that make for peace" must be the Gospel message of saving Truth that has come through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Without that, there can never be the unity and peace the Lord commands.

Endeavoring

Let us return to the first portion of the text and consider the word "endeavoring." It is the translation of the word that conveys the idea of putting forth great and energetic effort, diligence, attentiveness, and alertness. The unity of the Spirit and peace among brethren requires work on the part of brethren in the Lord. As in the home, in a business, on an athletic team, there must be a great expenditure of effort on the part of all those involved to make the unity workable and successful. Unity and peace just don't happen. When they exist, their every existence indicates somebody is hard at work, doing the right thing, following the correct path, listening to the proper message.

Endeavoring will demand self-sacrifice. To be a disciple of Christ, one must learn to "deny himself" [Matt. 16:24]. Not only must he allow the will of God to govern his life rather than his own will, he must consider his brethren before himself if there is to be unity and peace. Herein is possibly one of the real sources of problems that arise from time to time among brethren. Somebody thinks too highly of himself.

"Let nothing be done through strife and vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:3). The verse preceding our text calls for *"lowliness and meekness."* Humility is a quality we all should desire and for which we seriously strive to develop. 1 Peter 5:5, *"...for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."* Surely, one cause of division is that some get the idea that they are superior, they must have their way, others must conform to their wishes, and they are like Diotrefes, *"who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them..."* (3 John 9).

Do you ever wonder how much strife has been caused in congregations and the brotherhood generally because some just aspire too much to be the most important, the leader, the major person, the one to see, "the biggest dog in the kennel?" They seek rank, power, fame, glory, applause, personal gain, and harbor a jealousy toward those who challenge their dominance. Churches have divided over men, as the church in Corinth was about to do, because some for the sake of self create their own following to the disruption of the church. Selflessness is surely one of the things that make for unity and peace, while selfishness and pride in the hearts of brethren will provide the Devil a weapon of destruction. A man has matured greatly when he does not seek his own, but seeks the welfare and benefit of others before himself. He is much more content himself because he is not troubled about somebody overtaking him in anything. He does what he can, the best he can, and is grateful to do what he can and that others can even do more. Much can be done for the Lord when we are not concerned who among us is going to get the credit.

While truth makes for unity and peace, false doctrines produce the contrary. Romans 16:17, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them."* Error causes

division. For example, for many years brethren interested in restoring the New Testament church and abiding by the New Testament pattern used the kind of music in worship that Scripture authorizes. They sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Mechanical instruments of music were not an issue until some decided they wanted them, and the lack of authority for them notwithstanding, pushed them into congregation after congregation. The result was division because of the introduction of a false and erroneous practice. Examples can be multiplied to illustrate the truth that error, not truth, causes division. Opposing error does not cause division. Truth produces unity. Some charge brethren who stand for truth with causing division when they stand against the innovations and digressions of others. This is a scurrilous and vicious charge that is undeserving. Standing for truth is not the provocation of division. The doctrines of men cause division. Those who are critics of faithful brethren who oppose error are themselves contributors to division. One has written, "If we are to eliminate human division, we must eliminate human doctrines."

Acts 20:29,30 is Paul's warning to the elders of the same church to which this epistle of our text was originally sent. *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them."* He warned of "grievous wolves" that would enter the flock, even coming from among themselves, that would speak perverse things that would draw disciples away. This was a most serious warning that is as timely today as when Paul first presented it in the long ago. Wolves do not care about the welfare of sheep. They want what they want and will take what they can. They will tear up and destroy if it accommodates their agenda. Have we not sadly witnessed this from the liberal elements, the Jubilee

people and those of kindred mind and attitude, the scholarly of the schools, the large churches of prominence and wealth? Have they given any indication of concern to what they have done and continue to do to the unity and peace among brethren? Truth is not at all their watchword. Unity is not their aim. Fellowship with anybody and everybody that says they "believe" in Jesus is what they seek. They do not hesitate to tear down churches of long standing faithfulness, taking over where they have never built, in order to advance their passion for change regardless of what it takes to do it. How they shout loudly the need for "love." Has there ever been an element of people in the church who shows less love for brethren, less love for truth, less love for the Lord and His church than those of this stripe?

Their false doctrines, alongside their ridicule of truth and faithful brethren, dominate their history. The church has bled and suffered because of them, and may well continue to do so for years to come. Untold numbers of souls will be lost that could have been saved if such had never come upon the scene. None could possibly be so naive and blind as to think the digression the church has suffered at their hands in recent decades is conformity to "*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*"

Much division has been caused and may again be caused among brethren because of theories, philosophies, speculations, "isms" and hobbies that some hold. Binding what God has not bound causes division. Loosing what God has bound will cause division. Striving to be different for the sake of being different will cause division. There is no point to such conduct. Desiring to be like others, whether it be like denominations or other congregations, can cause division. We should be like other congregations only as they are like the church that is taught and condoned to be pleasing in God's sight as we read from the New Testament. Again, it goes back to following the truth.

Of course, when we stand for truth we must do so with the proper spirit and attitude. Harsh, bitter words of hatred are never to be condoned. Misrepresentations cannot be permitted even though some may direct them against you. In this same epistle Paul advises brethren in *"speaking the truth in love"* (Eph. 4:15). There must be genuine love for the truth, even though we must be aware that all do not have a love for the truth (2 Thess. 2:10). We must love the brotherhood even if some do not (1 Peter 2:17). We must love the lost and make the effort to teach them the saving Gospel as well as have sufficient love for the Lord to abide in His way. This was Paul's attitude in all his labors. *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved"* (Rom. 10:1). There is no conflict between love and taking a strong, uncompromising stand for the truth and speaking with certainty the condemnations of error. This very thing our Lord did as well as His inspired apostles. In fact, when love is of the kind, quality and to the extent that it should be we cannot do other than to take a strong, determined, bold, and uncompromising stand for the truth with sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8).

We have to be aware, however, that our lack of love, lack of forbearance, lack of tolerance of human failings, lack of patience, and lack of longsuffering sometimes allows division to erupt when it could have been avoided. When brethren sin, should we not allow "space to repent" as the Lord allowed (Rev. 2:21)? When one might be restored should we not make the effort (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19)? Can sincere love do less? Should a brother show his determination to continue in that which is sinful and false, shall we not show our love to exercise the disciplinary measures God's Word commands? How can we claim love for him or the welfare of the church and do otherwise? *"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"* (1 Cor. 5:6) if we just ignore sin in the camp. Rather, we must

demonstrate we care one for another (1 Cor. 12:25), ready to bear one another's burdens. *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:2), always helping one another get to heaven.

Possibly as much as anything other than the truth, **an attitude of forgiveness toward those who repent makes for peace.** Even toward those who will not repent, we should have God's attitude of a willingness to forgive the penitent. Some find it difficult to turn loose and let go of offenses. Harboring grudges only perpetuates strife and tensions. Can we be forgiven if we are not forgiving? *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matt. 6:14,15). The idea of letting it go and putting it away makes for peace. Forgiveness is never, however, to include ignoring sin as if it does not matter.

Control of the tongue, self-discipline, mastering the temper, guarding the tone of voice, can all make for peace. Whereas the loss of control in these areas will provoke division, even when unity could have been attained. When these abilities are under control they can work for the peace, harmony, and oneness that pleases the Lord. These are things that we can and must do in *"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* They make up our endeavors.

Keep The Unity

The word translated "keep" conveys the thought of guarding and protecting. Here is something brethren dare not throw away, but that which must be carefully and diligently maintained. Every work must be geared that unity and peace persevere. These we must keep and not leave. "Keep" comes from the same word used by Paul when he spoke how he

"kept" the faith [2 Tim. 4:7]. There must be faithfulness, persistence, and determination to hold firmly to unity and peace.

This implies that we hold on to something that previously exists. When we come to Christ we enter into communion and fellowship with the redeemed; we become children in God's family; we are in the one body which is the church because we have been baptized into the one body [1 Cor. 12:13], and we have the same mediator, which is Christ. *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus"* [1 Tim. 2:5]. We have unity and peace. But that must be maintained. The Holy Spirit's guidance by the New Testament shows us how to accomplish this.

But the statement not only implies here is something that exists that must be preserved, but there is the possibility that this virtue and desirable quality can be fractured and shattered. If unity and peace are not kept, division and strife will take their place. This very fact should put us on guard against every inroad of diversion and digression that comes down the path that rends asunder the unity and peace of brethren. Some naively contend that such will not happen; that some who were once notable for their power and strength could not possibly digress. This only makes the church vulnerable to being deceived and led astray. As precious as unity and peace that is produced by the Holy Spirit is and should be precious to the faithful, we must be alert to the potential havoc that can be caused that would remove these blessings from among us.

A Word About Peace

As we have already noted, unity and peace is the goal which Paul discusses and desires for brethren to possess. We have already noted also the characteristics of the kind and type of unity under consideration.

We have seen that mere unity is not the ultimate aim. Neither is peace among brethren the ultimate aim. These things are the generous and blessed by-products of the labors of the Holy Spirit through the Word. But what kind of peace should we have in mind?

Some evidently think that "going along to get along" is the peace that passeth understanding. This is a mistake. Cannot people be at peace, even with each other, and yet not be at peace with God!

Christ, the Prince of Peace, who brought the Gospel of peace, provides peace between man and God. We offend God by sinning against Him and alienating ourselves from Him. We must have peace with God. God has provided that peace through Christ. We must be reconciled to God. Paul's message was the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). We are reconciled by being forgiven by God of our sins which are washed away through the graciously provided blood of the Son of God at Calvary. As already noted, the state of this reconciliation is in the one body (Eph. 2:16).

We can have peace within self, among ourselves, and with all those around us and never have the spiritual peace of salvation that Christ gives. When we are at peace with God, we are at peace with everyone else who is at peace with God. This is the reason those in the church have peace with each other, and are to endeavor to keep that peace and unity with each other.

There is a "bond" between us. Paul mentions in verse two about "*forbearing one another in love.*" We often sing the song, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." The word "bond" is defined as being like the ligaments in the body, holding it together and enabling it to function harmoniously. Actually, God's people compose this spiritual body, and love is the ligament that holds us in unity and peace.

The Seriousness Of The Theme

"Love of the Brotherhood" is a fundamental of Christianity. Our text relates directly to this noble attribute. Could we really over-emphasize the need of brotherly love, charity, seeking the good of the other, unity, and peace? Never should we seek these things the wrong way. But never do we minimize the grandeur of them.

Another way the Holy Spirit has stressed their value is by the warning and condemnation of any who would disturb them. Proverbs six speaks of seven things the Lord hates, and one of them is "*he that soweth discord among brethren*" (v.19). L. R. Wilson wrote, "The soldier who thrust the spear into the Lord's dead body was guilty of far less than the one who rends his spiritual body." We can see why this is true. The soldier did not actually harm the Lord because He was already dead. But the spiritual body, the church, is alive. Only the soldier would be condemned for his deed, and we can only hope that he may have been among those who later recognized Jesus as the Son of God and came to Him, although we cannot know this. But he who tears apart the church, the body of Christ, not only damns his own soul, but think of the many other precious souls that are adversely affected by his sinister actions. Think of those who will never be reached because of it. Think of those who will be led into apostasy and unfaithfulness because it. Such things are the real results of division and the destruction of unity and peace.

The seriousness of the theme and this particular text should motivate every one of us when in the midst of division and when searching for the causes of it to ask as did the apostles of Christ at the last Passover Feast when Jesus told them one would betray Him. They asked, "Lord, is it I?" We must not be guilty of creating division, dissension, strife, confusion, apostasy, digression, schism in the Lord's

church, for we will be damned if we do. When the day of judgment comes upon us, will it be justly said that we were among those who were found "*endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?*" May it be so!

Chapter 10

My Quitting Affects The Church

Galatians 5:7-9

Gilbert Gough

After the period of the seventy years of Babylonian captivity was over, there were three major returns of the Jews to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel returned with 50,000 people in 536 B.C. to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. In 458 B.C., Ezra returned with 1,700 Jews to Jerusalem to restore the worship of God and restoring the lives of the people to God. Nehemiah, the Persian king's Jewish cupbearer, came back to Jerusalem with an unknown number of Jews in 445 B.C. to build the wall around the unprotected city of Jerusalem.

While yet under Persian rule, Nehemiah heard that the city of Jerusalem was vulnerable to her enemies. It grieved him to hear such news (Neh. 1:4). He was so sad that the king, Artaxerxes, noticed his low countenance, and inquired of his servant as to the reason for his depression. When Nehemiah told his king of the plight of Jerusalem, the king allowed him to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls around the city (Neh. 2:1-10).

Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and began to encourage the people to work on the walls. In fifty-two days the wall was finished (Neh. 6:15) because "*the people had a mind to work*" (Neh. 4:6).

The next task at hand was to restore the law of God in the land. After the temple was dedicated (Neh. 12:27ff), the temple offices were restored (Neh.

12:44ff]. Also, the temple needed purging of the foreigner Tobiah the Amorite, and it was noticed that the priests of God were being neglected in their support of tithes (Neh. 13:4-22). In this setting, Nehemiah asks a question of grave importance: "*Why is the house of God forsaken?*" (Neh. 13:11)

The answer to that question was obvious: The people had quit tending to, taking care of, God's house. Whatever the reasons [perhaps "excuses" would be a better word] were, everything was in disarray. Responsibilities were neglected by the priests because the people were not supporting them. God was not pleased!

The church of Christ is the house or temple of God today! Paul wrote the Corinthian brethren and in his first epistle said, "*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are*" (1 Cor. 3:16,17). In his second epistle he reaffirmed the church as the temple of God. "*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God...*" (2 Cor. 6:16). To Timothy Paul wrote, "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*" (1 Tim. 3:15). The Hebrew writer penned, "*But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we...*" (Heb. 3:6). From these inspired scriptures, there is no doubt that the church is the spiritual house or temple of God today.

Christians are priests of God and have responsibilities. Peter addresses this fact when he wrote,

⁵"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. ... ⁹But ye are a chosen genera-

tion, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"
[1 Peter 2:5,9).

As priests, Christians are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices" and "shew forth the praises of him," meaning Christians have work to do.

However, it is the case that the house/temple of God with its priests needs to be asked the same question Nehemiah posed to the Jews. "Why is the house of God forsaken?" Whatever the reasons (again, perhaps "excuses" is the better word) are, the church has quit fulfilling its God-given responsibilities. Such neglect has and will continue to affect the church adversely in its worship; its work and growth. Let us examine some ways the church has quit its obligations and see how it has affected the house of God.

False Doctrine

The church is inundated with false teachers espousing their false doctrines. The church of God is being attacked from without and from within. If God's people stand firmly upon the Truth, the Word of God, it can withstand any attack of the devil and his henchmen. However, many brethren are giving "place to the devil" when they are explicitly commanded not to (Eph. 4:27). Error and corruption enters the church and there is sin in the camp. Again, the church could withstand the onslaught of those who are departing and have departed from the faith, **IF** they stand firmly for the Truth.

In this age of apostasy and indifference to Truth, the blessed, beautiful bride of Christ has been raped and molested by evil doers and complacent brethren have allowed it to happen. How did this awful situation come to exist? The answer: Brethren have quit

fighting for the Truth, stopped opposing error, and ceased loving God! Thus, the house of God has been forsaken! Their quitting has adversely affected the church.

Christians are an army of soldiers. Soldiers fight and make war. They defend the territory of their King, and they push back the forces that oppose them. In fact, soldiers of Christ are to spread the territory of their King by advancing their cause. Paul wrote Timothy and said, *"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier"* (2 Tim. 2:3,4). He gave charge to the young preacher, *"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life..."* (1 Tim. 6:12). Paul, who was a stalwart soldier of the cross of Christ, said of his ministry, *"I have fought a good fight..."* (2 Tim. 4:7). He did not ask Timothy to do anything that he was not already doing and had done.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he charged the church to *"put on the whole armour of God"* (Eph. 6:11,13). Please note that Christians are to wear armour (Eph. 6:14-17). Armour is for soldiers. Therefore, Christians are soldiers.

Also, Paul sets forth who the enemy is. *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Eph. 6:12). When Jesus said to Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight..."* (John 18:36), He was explaining that His kingdom was not engaged in carnal warfare, because His kingdom was not of this world. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, so here is the explanation why we, the church, fight not against flesh and blood. In Luke 17:20,21 Jesus said to the demanding inquiring Pharisees, *"The kingdom of God cometh not with*

observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Jesus' kingdom will not come with carnal military force that is likened unto nations of the earth. "The kingdom of God is within you" meaning that His kingdom is spiritual in nature. His army is spiritual in nature and will not take up arms against flesh and blood.

Now, do not misunderstand. Jesus' kingdom, His army of soldiers, will fight against its enemies, but its enemies are not flesh and blood. The enemies are the forces of the devil. The battleground is *in* the hearts of men and women *for* the hearts of men and women! With the one offensive weapon provided by God, *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"* Christians go into battle well-protected with the armour of God and never retreating. Ah, but there's the rub. So many have quit fighting for the hearts and minds of men and women. So many have laid down their armour and put their sword back into its scabbard. The church is vulnerable to every attack of Satan, and the church is under severe attack now!

The church cannot quit "fighting the good fight of faith." The church must persevere even when the battle gets hot and the enemies rage. The bride of Christ must be defended, her territories must spread, and she must prevail! *"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* [1 Cor. 15:57]. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith"* [1 John 5:4].

Forsaking The Assemblies

The church is obligated to worship God *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24). God is the high and holy One worthy of adoration and praise (Isa. 57:15). God, who should be worshipped by right of creation and redemption, has specified that we are to worship Him

"in spirit" (with the right disposition of heart) and *"in truth"* (in harmony with God's instruction). One main aspect for the church worshipping God *"in spirit and in truth"* is, there has to be a time and a place for worship to be observed. God has required the church to assemble together upon the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). How long and how often saints meet on the first day of the week (or at any other place and time) is a decision of the overseers of any local congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) and God enjoins upon saints to *"obey them [elders] that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves"* (Heb. 13:17). The assembling of the saints upon the first day of the week is a must for all children of God (Heb. 10:25).

When brethren quit attending as they ought, it affects the church in many ways. First, the brethren who abandon the assembling of the saints have placed their souls in danger of torment by violating an ordinance of God (Heb. 10:25). Second, they discourage others who do attend regularly, and this discouragement may be devastating to babes in Christ, the young in faith (Rom. 14:7). Third, they have deprived themselves of the spiritual nourishment needed to sustain them (Matt. 5:6; Heb. 5:12). Fourth, they cause those in the world who observe their lives to think there is not much importance to Truth and Christ's body, the church.

How many times does one have to miss an assembling of the saints in order to constitute quitting God and forsaking God's house? One time would be enough and that one time of willfully neglecting assembling with the saints would cause the need for repentance. We speak not of those who are genuinely sick or involved in an emergency. Those folks have not willfully abandoned the assembly, for they would attend if they could. Sometimes, one's occupation may demand one's time away from the assembled saints. However, caution is advised. If one works

because he wants to and because he loves making money, and intentionally misses the worship of God, he has sinned. If one works because one's job demands his presence, the worker must work it out with his employer that he either attends Sunday morning or Sunday evening. He must meet the obligation to worship God on the first day of the week.

Worldliness

Another reason why people quit working for and worshipping God is worldliness. When Paul was charging Timothy to be a good soldier, he expressed that *"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life..."* (2 Tim. 2:4). Worldliness is the entangling oneself in the mundane things of this life. One who commits outright sins like drinking the devil's brew, smoking the devil's weeds, speaks the devil's language and participates in the devil's sensual pleasures are worldly and will not inherit a place in heaven (1 Cor. 6:9,10; Gal. 5:19:21; Col. 3:5,6). However, one does not have to be involved in matters which are intrinsically sinful. The obsession of any wholesome, but worldly, activity which takes precedent over the more important spiritual matters is worldly. Jesus said, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matt. 6:33). Anything that receives a higher priority than Christ, His church and the soul's salvation is of the world. There is nothing inherently sinful about being actively involved in sports, but if sports absorbs all your thoughts and dominates your time, worldliness has overtaken you. This principle can apply to many things of this life like your job, recreation, possessions, and even your family [cf. Luke 14:16-27].

When Jesus was explaining in the parable of the sower about the soil where thorns sprouted and overtook the good seed, He said, *"And the cares of*

this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). Three items of worldliness are mentioned: 1) "cares of this world;" 2) "deceitfulness of riches;" and 3) "lusts of other things." Many have become Christians by hearing and obeying the Word of God. They remain faithful for awhile, and then worldliness overtakes them. The "thorns" of life have choked out the life they had in Christ. Now they are spiritually dead and of no use to the cause of Christ.

The apostle John warned,

¹⁵"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" [1 John 2:15-17].

Christians must ever be on guard as the devil throws his worldly arsenal of deceit at them [1 Peter 5:8; Eph. 6:11]. He will use "the lusts of the flesh," "the lusts of the eye," and "pride of life" to allure us away from God and salvation.

The solution to worldliness is to adhere to the advice of the inspired apostle Paul.

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

acceptable, and perfect, will of God” [Rom. 12:1,2].

*¹¹“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹²Teaching us that, **denying ungodliness and worldly lusts**, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” [Titus 2:11-13].*

Lack Of Prayer

Many brethren quit serving God through neglecting to pray for the house of God. The Savior taught that *“men ought always to pray, and not to faint”* [Matt. 18:1], but many have fainted and quit. The holy scriptures are abundant with the encouragement to pray. Paul with three emphatic words writes, *“Pray without ceasing”* [1 Thess. 5:17]. James writes that *“...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* [James 5:16]. Christians should always be *“continuing instant in prayer”* [Rom. 12:12]. *“...In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* [Phil. 4:6]. Saints of God must *“continue in prayer...”* [Col. 4:2]. Yet, many have quit praying for the church, for the elders and deacons, for the preacher, for the Bible class teachers, for the young and old, for the sick and infirmed.

If brethren quit praying, the needed help from God through His good providence is withheld. James says, *“...ye have not because ye ask not”* [James 4:2]. A failure to pray will rob the house of God of blessings desperately needed. As the lyrics of a beautiful hymn suggest, *“O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.”*

The early church emulated Jesus when they "*continued steadfastly...in prayers*" (Acts 2:42). This action on the part of the first century church is not only to be admired, but imitated.

Failure To Study God's Word

The problems facing the church would not exist if brethren loved the Truth (Zech. 8:19), knew the Truth (John 8:32), and told the Truth (Gal. 4:16). The Truth is God's Word (John 17:17). If brethren loved God's Word (which guides us through life to our heavenly destiny), there would be no difficulty in getting brethren to study the Bible. Knowing what the Bible says protects us from living the unfaithful life and losing our souls. David wrote, "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Psalm 119:11).

The church is made up of people who believe in God's Word and have obeyed it. With so many things in this world vying for our time, slowing down and taking time to meditate in Bible study just does not fit into our schedules. Yet, the Bible admonishes us by saying, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is*" (Eph. 5:17). It is a foolish thing man does to neglect to study God's Word. "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15).

A Gospel preacher once told that he went to visit some parents whose teenage daughter had tragically died. This good man wanted to bring comfort to their broken hearts. He asked for a Bible intending to read some comforting words. When he received the Bible, he had to wipe the dust off its cover. Opening its pages, to his astonishment a dirt dauber's nest fell out of it. When the parents saw what had happened, the mother began to cry saying, "Oh Preacher, my daughter never heard me pray, nor ever saw me reading

that Bible.” How tragic it was for the daughter to die, but how more tragic for a daughter to die without seeing her parents pray and study God’s Word.

Christians need to “...give heed to reading...” (1 Tim. 4:13) and be like the noble Bereans who “searched the scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). Hear the lyrics of the fourth verse and chorus of that beloved song, *Give Me The Bible*:

Give me the Bible, lamp of life immortal,
Hold up that splendor by the open grave;
Show me the light from heaven’s shining portal,
Show me the glory gilding Jordan’s wave.

Give me the Bible, Holy message shining;
Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way;
Precept and promise, law and love combining,
Till night shall vanish in eternal day.

The church that does not read and study the Bible is vulnerable to apostasy.

Absence Of True Love

Brethren talk about love all the time. It is not uncommon to hear them say, “We need more love for one another.” There is a sense in which that may be true, but hearing brethren saying that and seeing how they behave demonstrates they do not understand biblical love. Liberals are champions of spouting off about love, and yet are some of the most unloving people. To prove that, challenge their false ideas and evil practices. You will experience their “love.” They will attack and vilify you, OR they will ignore you! Now that is real “love!” Isn’t it? No, it is not.

Biblical love (*agape*) is not a mere feeling, but it is the realization that we have a duty to perform, a responsibility to One greater than ourselves. Jesus succinctly stated, “If ye love me, keep my command-

ments" (John 14:15). John the apostle wrote, "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous*" (1 John 5:3).

A Christian is to love God with all of his being.

³⁰*"Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ³¹And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12:30,31).

Love is absolutely of no value if it is not expressed through heartfelt obedience. All of man's affections, spirit, intellect, and will must be involved in loving God and in loving one's fellowman.

When people fail to obey the Gospel by refusing to **hear** the Word (Rom. 10:17), **believe** in Jesus (John 3:16), **repent** of their sins (Luke 13:3), **confess** their faith in Christ (Acts 8:37) and be **baptized** for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38), they do not love God or their own souls. When brethren refuse to teach others the Gospel (Matt. 28:19,20), to "*abstain from all appearance of evil*" (1 Thess. 5:22), to discipline brethren in sin (2 Thess. 3:6,14,15), to "*live soberly, righteously, and godly*" (Titus 2:12), and to live in harmony with God's will (John 15:10), then they show evidence that they do not love God or nor do they love the brotherhood (1 Cor. 8:3; 1 Peter 2:17).

Conclusion

When Paul wrote to the churches in the region of Galatia, he knew that many had quit fulfilling their responsibilities and that they were forsaking the

house of God. He wrote, *"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"* [Gal. 5:7-9]. They started the Christian race in fine fashion, but false teachers entered in among them and perverted the Gospel [Gal. 1:7-9]. They had *"fallen from grace"* [Gal. 5:4]. They had been influenced in the wrong way and had yielded to temptation. Paul rebukes them sharply in the Galatian letter because they had allowed themselves to become hindered in their obedience to the Truth. Hindrances come in many forms. The church must learn from the sins of the Galatian brethren.

May God bless the church to persevere [1 Cor. 15:58] and not grow weary in well doing [Gal. 6:9].

Chapter 11

Speak The Same Thing

1 Corinthians 1:10

Ferrell Hester

There is nothing more clearly taught in the Scriptures than that we must "Love the Brotherhood" if we expect to go to heaven. Paul wrote in Romans 12:10, *"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another."* Again in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, *"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another."* Then the Hebrew writer said, *"Let brotherly love continue"* (Heb. 13:1). The "beloved apostle" wrote, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death"* [1 John 3:14].

I do not believe there is any thing more essential to brotherly love than unity based upon what the Bible teaches. Thus my subject: **"LET US SPEAK THE SAME THING."**

To lay a foundation for our study, I want to read to you a passage of Scripture from 1 Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* Personally, I think this is one of the greatest, and most important passages of Scripture in the Bible. I do not mean by that, that there are any passages in the Bible that are of little or no importance. Certainly not! Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *"All scripture is given by inspira-*

tion of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Hence all Scripture is important. But I think this one is, or at least should be, of special interest to us since it is an admonition to unity. In this verse Paul mentions five things which make for unity. First, *"That you all speak the same thing..."*, second, *"That there be no division among you..."*, third, *"That you be perfectly joined together..."*, fourth, *"In the same mind..."*, fifth, *"In the same judgment."*

I'm sure we all understand that God and the Bible condemns division and confusion among religious people, and according to this passage the only way to avoid division and confusion, and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment is for all to speak the same thing. So my subject is, **LET US ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING**, and then, **HOW THIS CAN BE DONE**.

We all know we are living in an age of religious confusion. There are thousands of different doctrines being preached in this country alone which is all a result of a failure to do what Paul says in our text: **"ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING!"** Men and women are ignoring God's way and going about to establish their own way.

Someone might ask, *"How can we all speak the same thing in religion? Can we all see and understand alike?"* So long as people are guided by their own ideas and opinions, we will never be able to "all speak the same thing," since there are just about as many different opinions as there are people. The only way this can be done is to lay aside our ideas and opinions and be guided by the Word of God whether or not it is in harmony with our opinion, or what we may think about matters. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:11, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* Then Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:13, *"Hold fast*

the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me." Then in Isaiah 8:20, *"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."* Now these passages and many others that could be mentioned show that the only way religious people can avoid division and confusion and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment is to accept the Word of God as our only and final authority in religion regardless of what we THINK or of what someone else may SAY.

We must speak where and when the Scriptures speak, and of course that means we must speak all that the Scriptures say on all subjects, and not leave out anything to make them suit ourselves, or our friends. We must speak the whole Truth as did the apostle Paul. He said in Acts 20:20, *"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house."* Then in verse 27 he said, *"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* In Jeremiah 26:1-3, *"Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word."* Friends, that is what it means to "all speak the same thing!" However, there are people who claim to be religious (even some of our brethren) and yet they refuse to accept the whole truth as it is revealed in the Word of God. If you insist that they accept it, they want to get mad and argue. As someone has said, "it is easier for some people to get mad at the preacher than it is to get right with God!" (Sometimes even fire him!) Paul knew this would happen. You remember that he said in 2 Timothy 4:2-4,

2"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all

longsuffering and doctrine. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

We must always speak out against what the Scriptures condemn, either by principle or by special mention whether people like it or not. Paul said to Timothy, *"be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."* In other words, he is saying preach the Word when people like it and when they don't like it. We must not say "Well brother so and so takes a drink occasionally, and if I condemn drinking he will be offended at me, and there is old brother so and so who curses occasionally when he gets mad and takes the Lord's name in vain, and if I condemn cursing and swearing he might become offended at me." No, friends, that is not the way it is to be done. Paul says we are to reprove and rebuke people for their sins and then exhort them to righteous living. Yet, we must be both positive and negative in our preaching, and do it in the spirit of love, and not the sake of argument as Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:16.

But it is not enough to speak when and where the Scriptures speak. In order to "all speak the same thing," we must be silent where the Scriptures are silent. It is just as necessary to respect the silence of the Scriptures as it is to speak the whole truth. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:6 that we are to learn not to go beyond that which is written. It is just as sinful therefore to go beyond the teaching of the Word of God as it is to stop short of it. In Numbers 22:18, Balaam said to the servant of Balak when he was being tempted and encouraged to pronounce a curse upon God's people, *"If Balak would give me his*

house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more."

The Bible tells us very plainly what the consequences will be if we add to or take from the things which are written in God's book. In Revelation 22:18-19 John said,

¹⁸"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: ¹⁹And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Then, in 2 John 9, we have this warning given. *"Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."* Thus we can see that if we are to all speak the same thing as Paul says in our text, we must not go beyond that which is written in God's Word.

When God commands a certain thing to be done, it is very important that we do that very thing, and when he prescribes a certain way the thing commanded is to be done, then the way to do it is just as important as the thing to be done itself. But when God has not prescribed the way that a thing commanded is to be done to the exclusion of other ways, then we must not make a law where God had made none.

To illustrate what I mean, let us take the great commission as we have it recorded by Matthew. Jesus said, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe*

all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). Now, we notice first of all he said "GO." The doing of the thing commanded and the going is the thing that must be done. It is not up to us as to whether we go or stay, because the Bible says, *"If we say we know him and keep not his commandments we are liars and the truth is not in us."* Now, there are different ways of going. We may walk or ride. If we walk and preach the Gospel, we are doing what God said do. If we ride, we are still doing what He commanded when He said "GO."

Suppose I were to tell you that the only Scriptural way to go and preach the Gospel is to walk. Would I be respecting the silence of the Bible? No, a thousand time no! Because God did not prescribe any certain way of going to the exclusion of other ways. It is up to us to use the most convenient way available. The important thing is to "GO" and it makes no difference as to "how" we go.

If God had said walk, then it would be wrong to ride. On the other hand, if he had said ride, that would have left out many of our "old time" preachers of the Gospel who often walked for miles to preach because they had no way of riding. Well, anyway, I think we can see what the lesson is.

Then He said "TEACH." That is the thing commanded, and that is the thing that must be done. But what about the method of teaching? Must it be done publicly or privately? Well, God did not say how it is to be done. Paul used both methods. He said, *"I have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house."* In other words, Paul taught both publicly and privately. When I talk to someone privately, and tell them about what the Bible says about the importance of becoming a Christian and living the Christian life, I am doing exactly what God said do when he said "teach." When I attempt to preach the Gospel from the pulpit, I am still doing

what he said do when He said "TEACH." Then, there are the means of radio, television and the printed page and now even the computer is being used most effectively to get the Gospel into homes and offices where it might never have gone otherwise. When we use any of these means to teach the truth and nothing else, we are not going beyond nor stopping short of what He commands, because he has not specified any certain method by which the teaching is to be done.

Then in addition to the going and teaching, he said "BAPTIZE." But some "SMART" (?) preacher comes along and says, "It makes no difference whether you baptize or not because it is not essential." But remember friends, the Lord commanded it and the book says *"if we say that we know him and keep not his commandments we are liars and the truth is not in us."* And then, the same book says that *"All liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fires and brimstone."* So, those who have been taught MUST be baptized.

Well, how is it to be done? Has God told us how to do the baptizing? Some says it makes no difference, that sprinkling or pouring is all right if it satisfies ones conscience. But let us remember that when God has told us how a thing is to be done the way it is to be done is just as important as the thing to be done itself, and He certainly has told us just how the baptizing is to be done in such a simple way that it can be understood by any responsible person. Paul said in Romans 6:4-5,

⁴"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

He did not say we are sprinkled with him by baptism. As a matter of fact, sprinkling or pouring is not one time mentioned in the Bible in connection with baptism. In Colossians 2:12 he said, *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* So, if I were to tell you that sprinkling for baptism is just as good as immersion, I would be going beyond that which is written.

Well, what about the place where the baptizing is to be done? Must it be done in the creek? In the river? or in a baptistery such as we have here? Well, you know that is one of the things God said nothing about. Therefore it make no difference as to the place where it is done. Any place where there is enough water to bury a penitent believer in Christ is sufficient. The important thing is to do what he said, and he said "BAPTIZE."

In recent years the Lord's church has been, and still is, troubled with BRETHREN who are not speaking as the Scriptures speak. They are failing to respect the silence of the Scriptures. For instance, we have "brethren" who would have us believe that the silence of the Scriptures will allow mechanical instrumental music in worship. There are five New Testament passages that mention singing and not one of them mentions playing.

"And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name" (Rom. 15:9). "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15). "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). "And they sing the song of Moses the servant

of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3).

Did the silence of the Scriptures authorize Noah to use any other wood than gopher wood in building the ark? *"Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch" (Gen. 6:14).* The answer is obvious! Neither will the silence of the Scriptures allow the use of mechanical instruments of music in our worship to God. To do so would be to add to His word which we are commanded not to do. We read in Revelation 22:18-19,

¹⁸"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: ¹⁹And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Then we have "brethren" who are advocating women preachers, leading in prayer in mixed audiences, serving at the Lord's Table, song leaders, etc. *"But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12).* *"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. ³⁵And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (1 Cor. 14:34-35).* On these matters the "brethren" cannot plead "the silence

of the Scriptures” because these passages strictly and specifically forbid them.

Then there are the “brethren” who are fellowshipping the denominations. John wrote in 2 John 1:9-11,

⁹“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: ¹¹For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

Then we have this command recorded in 2 Corinthians 6:17, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” Then again in Ephesians 5:11, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Then in 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Where and how will these passages of Scripture allow the fellowshiping of the denominations!

Then there are the “brethren” who are stressing entertainment over the Gospel. There is not a gimmick the denominations have used that some of our “brethren” have not also tried. Now there are churches of Christ(?) in Huntsville, Alabama and Tullahoma, Tennessee that are showing the Andy Griffith [Mayberry] Show in their “Bible” classes. Evidently they believe there is more relevance in the Andy Griffith Show than there is in the Gospel of Christ. Is not the Gospel still God’s power to save the lost? Paul said in Romans 1:16, “For I am not

ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." I believe some of our "brethren" are ashamed of the Gospel today because they keep trying to substitute something else in its place. Is this inspired declaration no longer applicable? *"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls"* (James 1:21). Did not Paul declare,

¹"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; ²By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. ³For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-3).

Too bad that Paul did not have access to the Andy Griffith Show! Look at this passage: *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed"* (Gal. 1:8). Brethren, I am going to stick with the Gospel of Christ as it was preached by Paul and not the "gospel according to Andy Griffith!"

Let brotherly love continue. *"...Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

Chapter 12

Praying For The Brotherhood

Ephesians 6:18

Philip Davis

Just before sun-rise—

One silent soldier stands a lonely late-night vigil on the walls of the city awaiting the certain siege. Others, anxious and exhausted, nod, close to forbidden sleep. Lights shine around the camp—torches of enemy hordes massing for a dawn attack. This patriot's army is small and weary. God's soldiers are far outnumbered. The heathen, the Samaritans and the Devil himself have entered into league to destroy the kingdom of the living God.

Anguish strangles his emotions, like a killer at his throat. Courage melts away. He nearly panics when he remembers that God is *"not very far from every one of us"* (Acts 17:27). A sense of calm and sure resolve walks quietly the borders of his mind (Phil. 4:8; 1 Peter 2:23; 4:19; etc.).

Memory wanders back to days when Gideon, with three hundred men chosen by Jehovah God, put to flight the legion foe. These few succeeded, not by might or skill or terror, but because the Lord was on their side (cf. Isaiah 10:13). He knows that for the Christian soldier, *"to live is Christ and to die is gain,"* (Phil. 1:21f; cf. Gal. 2:20). His insight draws upon the truth that has sustained him all his life: *"This is not our long home"* (Eccl. 12:5).

With Job he reasons, *"Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity"* (Job 2:10, NASB)? If it is true that *"all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the*

called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NKJV), then he must brave any fearful ordeal that may await him once the battle starts again. He must love the Lord, but not "love his life unto death" (Rev. 12:11). Daily he confronts a private Armageddon. He agonizes, "How long, O Lord" (Rev. 6:10)? Moment by moment he must rely upon the promises of God's power and proximity (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 13:5,6). ***Strong faith is hard for weak man*** (Matt. 26:41; Rom. 7:19). Psalms 18:2,3, *"The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. ³I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies."*

Profane and barbaric people cannot be permitted to take the day. *"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4, KJV). *"These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful"* (Rev. 17:14, KJV).

Meditating, he takes stock of the prayer of Elijah when challenging the priests of Jezebel's cult—how his simple petition to the Almighty brought fire from heaven to consume the altar and its sacrifice! He grows bolder knowing that the supplication of this one prophet staid the rains from Palestine for many wretched months.

Consider Daniel in the lions' den and the Hebrew children in the royal furnace refusing to beg for deliverance. What of the plea of desperate Hannah longing for a baby boy? Think of Moses' intercessions for stubborn, stiff-necked Israel. Jehovah would have slaughtered them! Remember Abraham's entreaty that Sodom be spared for the sake of ten righteous men?

Prayer! Prayer is the only answer. Only prayer can have such profound effect. This is not the prayer of last resort; yet when all other efforts have been exhausted, man can still implore his God to intervene in his behalf.

Hear the whispered evening blessing of a humble little child, "without any doubting" [Matt. 18:1-3; Mark 10:14-16]. Become as one of them. Let trust increase. Depend on God.

⁵But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁶For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. [James 1:5-8, NASB].

Pray for the noble cause. Pray for the humble need. Pray that Heaven's plan be accomplished, saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" [Luke 22:42]. Pray that the mighty army, the family, the kingdom of the everlasting God be spared or delivered from her enemies without and within [1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 11:26].

Pray. Pray for those sick in body and in soul. Pray for the sinner or him whose faith is weak. Pray for those who are indifferent or may have lost their way. Pray for peace and for peace-makers. Pray for rulers and the rule of right. Pray for justice and righteousness and holiness. Pray for the church!

Pray For The Brotherhood!

Were each of us more diligent in prayer, the world would be profoundly different, if only our own "little corner of it" (James 5:17,19). Let us cultivate a stronger and fuller prayer life. We may find ourselves pleasantly surprised at the good blessings God is waiting to give us if we only ask.

But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" [1 Cor. 2:9, NKJV].

The Armor Of God's Soldier

God's people often have been seen as warriors sworn to righteousness, an army of soldiers wrestling with the hidden powers of sin (Eph. 6:12). Our armament is limited, confined to that which God supplies: truth and righteousness, the Gospel word, a shield of faith, salvation's helmet guarding hearts and minds (Phil. 4:6-8). Our only weapon, a razor sword: that simple word, so ancient, spoken all those years ago. Yet it is now as sharp as ever (Rom. 1:16f; Heb. 4:12). All of these are needed. Each of them is good. But one more preparation must be made, another precaution taken: we must pray.

Prayer is a truly priceless part of the armor of a saint. It is "a very present help" in "time of need" (Psalm 46:1; Heb. 4:16). It defends from solitude. It projects the supplicant into the throne-room of eternity. Prayer brings to our Creator's mind your name and mine, one at a time. Though he already knows the hairs that grow upon our heads and the wishes that grow within our hearts he loves to hear our pleas (Matt. 6:8; 10:30).

In a way, prayer asks instruction of our commander-in-chief. He replies in the words of the written revelation. Prayer presses to the bosom of the Chris-

tian foot-soldier the reassurance of the Lord's ever-present care [1 Peter 5:7]. Prayer empowers our resolve.

*¹³“Wherefore take unto you the **whole armour** of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸**Praying always with all prayer and supplication** in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” [Eph. 6:13-18].*

All the panoply of God are in the hand and heart of man except this one. It reaches to the halls of heaven, the courts of the Almighty, the expanses of Eternity. Prayer lets us “behold the everlasting God...”

²⁸Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. ²⁹He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. ³⁰Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: ³¹But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint [Isaiah 40:28-31].

Prayer helps us to "renew our strength." *"Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment"* [Isaiah 41:1].

It calms our fears and trepidation because it leans on God.

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" [Isaiah 41:10].

Prayer invokes a perfect power which no mortal can resist. Lenski muses on Ephesians 6:13-18 in his commentary, "Prayer must be listed here because it brings our divine ally to our side in the battle on the wicked day." What foolishness to leave unused our mightiest of tools, the power of the changeless God [James 1:17, etc.).

Why Pray For The Brotherhood [The Church]?

The list of reasons for prayer to the Father is without end. Consider now some reasons for petitions for the brotherhood, the church, ones of "like precious faith," the family of God. We need to pray for the brotherhood—

To draw near to God. One means of drawing near to God, both intellectually and emotionally, is through prayer. *"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded"* [James 4:8]. *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* [Heb. 4:16].

To connect with the eternal. Prayer is a living link to the eternal. Though God knows our needs before we speak, he wants us to ask His blessing [Matt. 6:45]. Hebrews 12 assures us that he is a loving

Father who will bless us according to that which furthers his will and thus betters our spiritual lot.

To develop world-wide vision. Too often Christians have a limited view of the church. We seem to be lost in a sort of spiritual tunnel-vision, self-absorbed and unaware of those of “common faith” elsewhere in the world (Titus 1:4; 1 Peter 5:9). We forget or do not realize the need for a “love” of the “brotherhood” and an active concern in its well-being. The apostle still entreats us, “*Love the brotherhood*” (1 Peter 2:17).

To confront the problems that face us. There has never been a time when the church was in graver danger of disappearing or disintegrating. True, the Dark Ages were bad. It is equally true that the kingdom of God on earth (the church) will not disappear until the Lord calls an end to time and creation. Yet on every side there is confusion, compromise, contentiousness and condescension. We cannot become more “inclusive” than God in our “fellowship.” Inclusion without God’s approval, authorization and validation is merely delusion and deception.

To foster mutual love. When we pray for the brotherhood, we more nearly come to love one another and work toward the common good. Paul writes, “*by love serve one another*” (Gal. 5:13). We serve in part by prayer. Love for another may include destroying error, doing good works, trying to understand each other, extending the benefit of the doubt and many other helpful practices.

There should be purpose to our prayer.

When Is The Time?

Charles Dickens wrote, “These are the times that try men’s souls.” Indeed, as with Paul so long ago, the present trouble tries our resolve (1 Cor. 7:26). We need the prayers of one another. The brotherhood must surely pray for those with whom they walk this

narrow road. More now than ever—with Christianity under attack and morality on the wane—we must draw near to each other and more so to our God. Daily, each time the body comes together to worship, in our private devotions, "in all places," we must make prayer a central theme, a priority above most others (1 Tim. 2:8).

Who Will Intercede?

The vital interests of all Christians benefit when prayer abounds. Those who pray may help to solve the church's problems, heal her wounds and ensure her health. The Lord may grant our fervent pleas and bring about a change in us (James 1:5ff; 5:13,16; etc.).

By training eyes and energies upon the task at hand, the kingdom can advance. The Savior's flock may move ahead constructively and spiritually, laying aside bitterness and envy (Eph. 4:29–5:1). How sweet to elevate the Lord and church—their shared well-being our concern—into their rightful place (James 3:5-4:3).

God wants to bless us. *"And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27). "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live" (Heb. 12:9)? "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).*

Let our prayer of intercession seek from God the common good.

Let Us Pray: But For What Cause?

Surely all Christians want the good of the brotherhood. Just as surely all informed saints regard other New Testament Christians to be brethren even if they are in error or weak in faith. Paul insists, along this line, *"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"* (2 Thess. 3:15).

Let us pray for the brotherhood because of our past. Marvel at the glory of the church's birth on that distant Pentecost so Spirit-filled. That day that Christ brought to this world the kingdom Daniel prophesied. He established that which will stand for ever (Daniel 2:44).

Recall the rigors of our early days of development and growth. A martyr's death was not uncommon then. Shudder at the trials and perils our forbears have endured. Abhor the times of darkness, when error overshadowed truth. Implore the Lord that such dark ages do not come our way again. Pray for those in hostile lands who even yet may lose their lives to dare to speak the Savior's name.

Give thanks that God permits seed of Gospel truth to prosper still. It guarantees the continuity of our existence on the earth (Luke 18:8). Entreat the Lord that ears will hear and hearts will turn, that "great and effectual doors" will be opened in our own day as in theirs (1 Cor. 16:9).

Bless Jehovah for the wonder of the mind of "restoration," the genius which from time to time, awakens people's common sense. In the vein of pure Josiah, let us ask that once again a strong revival sweep the land like long-lost "prairie wildfire." Beg our God that borders spread, influence grow, unto his glory.

Pray about the peril we, the brotherhood, the church, now face. Cynical, desperate, disenchanted, self-willed people in recent years have poured out contempt on the glorious body called the church. Some have decried it as corrupt. Some have ridiculed it as out of touch. Some have denigrated it for its imperfections. Some have even questioned the idea of restoring the first century church with the insincere barb, "Which first century church? The church at Corinth with its immorality? The church at Laodicea with its apathy?" Such remarks appear intended only to show disrespect, for their very nature demonstrates misrepresentation of the points-of-view that they oppose.

The perfect-in-practice church has never existed and cannot for it is just that: "the ideal" and perfect. Imperfect people will always yield an imperfect church on the human side. This does not lessen the perfection of the design of the church, for God "planned" and "allowed for" the human element of error in that design.

No church of the first century was perfect in the terms the critic wishes to use. They all too were struggling for spiritual maturity. Yet even Corinth with its flaws could be called "*the church of God which is at Corinth.*" Such language does not excuse the errors, but it does acknowledge the point that God still recognizes a flawed congregation while it acts in good faith to correct its problems (Rev. 2:1-7). Further, the imperfection of "execution" of God's perfect plan does not diminish the validity of the effort to strive for the perfection that God righteously demands.

Conclusively one can identify characteristics that show a local congregation to be a church recognized by God even should its spirit or practice be lacking [within the confines described]. Revelation 2 and 3 show as well that some point can be reached when the "candlestick" of Heaven's affirmation can be

rescinded and that church be removed from the “list” of those in “good standing” (cf. Rev. 3:5, etc., concerning the “book of life”).

What shall we say to those who do not believe membership in the New Testament church to be necessary? How can we persuade those who have no real understanding of the concept of the church as presented in the New Testament? Perhaps review of some of the Bible’s instruction could help. For example consider this.

The church of the New Testament is the body of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32). It is the body of the saved (Acts 2:47). Those who are saved according to the instruction of the Lord are automatically added to that body. To “join” any other religious body constitutes spiritual bigamy.

The church is the ark of safety in which one must be found in order to survive the destruction of the world by God some fearful day (1 Peter 3:21ff; Heb. 11:7). Failure to be in that ark is to assure that one will be destroyed in the judgment of the Lord.

The church is a Divine institution with human frailties. Yes! It is an “institution,” meaning that it is “set up, established, founded, placed” by God (see *Webster’s New World Dictionary*). Further its inception was at Jerusalem on Pentecost of Acts 2, not with the advent of the “restoration movement” a few generations ago. Whatever its imperfections they are in execution and not in design. The human element limits the ideal will of God on earth and even His will in the circumstance of human-kind’s sin. But the existence of human sin does not take away from the perfection of the intent of God and the body as it was created.

That someone mis-adds a column of numbers neither means that he cannot correct it nor that someone else cannot add it right the first time and know that he has “gotten it right.” Further, no human flaw detracts from the system called mathematics.

The same is true of Christianity. Moreover, that God allows us to be imperfect as we go about trying to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" is a part of the perfect Divine design that includes our free-will response (Phil. 2:12).

The church is the family of God (Eph. 3:15). We are children of God through faith in (in the body of, in relation to) Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26-27). We have been given the adoption that we may cry "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Because we are God's family, we must nobly bear the family name (Eph. 4:1; 5:1). We must not grieve our Heavenly family nor the family of God on earth by shamelessness and faithlessness, but rather stand up to be counted as proud members of the household of Heaven.

Some have yet to learn that the church is the "army" of Christ ordered to do battle with the forces of evil and compromise (Rev. 19:19; 2 Tim. 2:3-4). Paul pens, *"...For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Eph. 6:10-18). We are not here to win popularity contests. We are not here to negotiate terms of peace. God demands total, unconditional surrender by his adversaries and a pledge of allegiance to his kingdom. We are here to win a war—a spiritual one.

The church, the brotherhood, is the Kingdom of God on earth (Matt. 16:18). Its sovereign ruler is the Lord Jesus Christ who someday will abdicate in favor of the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Does God have any citizens of his kingdom who are "not citizens?" Are there those who are a part of the domain of God without having taken their "oath of citizenship?" Some would have us believe that the privileges of citizenship are available to spiritual "illegal aliens" (Eph. 2:12). This is wicked wishful thinking. Even a surface examination shows it to be wrong. Some would have us believe that rather than meeting the

conditions God set down in Scripture for becoming a member of that kingdom and enjoying its privileges and its legacy, any “good work” that we choose to offer should be sufficient to usher us into the Heavenly realm. It is not a happy anticipation, but neither is it a wrong judgment to say that those who do not “do the will of [my] father which is in Heaven” will not be blessed in eternity (Matt. 7:21).

The brotherhood, the church, is the body of the believers. “Believers” must be taken in the sense in which the Bible uses it. It does not merely mean those who say, “Lord, Lord,” but those who by their obedience to the Gospel have entered into the one body of the saved (see Acts 6:7; Rom. 1:5; 2:7-8; 6:17; 16:25; Gal. 3:26f; 2 Thess. 1:8; Matt. 7:21; James 2:27; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:17; etc). While the church has some members who are not faithful to the Lord, the “saved” of the church are those who both have become Christians according to the “pattern” of the New Testament and are faithful to the Lord. It is certain that there is absolutely no other way to become a Christian than the way Jesus and the inspired writers describe it in the pages of the New Testament: **belief, repentance, confession and baptism** unto the remission of sins. To remain in the grace of God one minimally must “*arise to walk in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4), “*walk in the light*” (1 John 1:6ff), “*add to [his] faith...*” (2 Peter 1:5ff), and be “*faithful unto*” (“up to and including the point of”) *death*” (Rev. 2:10; 21:7), etc.

The will of God is that according to the requirements of the faith (called the Gospel), each of us should submit to the sovereignty of the Almighty, repent of sins and profess faith in the grace—providing and forgiveness—channeling sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. When we are willing to make a “total surrender” to this “captain of salvation” (Heb. 2:10; 12:2), we can undergo the death of our old man and his allegiance to the prince of darkness in our baptism

and "rise to walk in newness of life" (John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:46; Rom. 6, et al.). Until then, we are not the church of the Lord, not a part of the brotherhood, but the enemies of God.

This list is far from complete. These are merely some of the many ways in which Scripture speaks of the one body called the Brotherhood, the church (Eph. 4:4). It is not just some "small branch of the Christian community," as some contend. The brotherhood as described in the New Testament (whose members we become according to the required conditions there described) **is** the Christian community. And, that community cannot be described by any variation of "the Man and not the plan." The church—let us never malign it. The Brotherhood—let us always build it up (Rom. 14:19; Eph. 4:12,16,29). May it never be that we allow those who have departed from the faith (and, thus, from the church) in all but name mislead us concerning its nature and its importance in the eternal plan of the timeless God.

Then, let us pray for the brotherhood. Pray because each day we face the perils of compromise: the spiritual Samaritans—those who serve both God and human religion—both dilute and pollute the pristine practice and precepts of the peaceable kingdom. Pray over the perils of extremes, of legalism, liberalism, cold formalism, hollow ritualism. Weep because of our apathy, internal strife, complacency, of weariness in well-doing (Gal. 6:7-9). Entreat the Lord that materialism and worldliness not take the day.

Pray to find a way to solve the two-edged dilemma part of which is an over-sympathy for impenitent sinners and the other part of which is a crisis of compassion. While some dismiss or mitigate the sinfulness of sin, others lack adequate sympathy for the sinner's difficulty in overcoming; and they are reluctant to forgive (Jude 1:22,23; Gal. 6:1-2).

A kindred problem leads some to turn the church into a social program that overlooks all principle in search of worldly ills' relief and earthly joy's fulfillment. The other side shows blatant deficiency of compassion for those impoverished of this world's goods and those whose "luck" has long since gone [sometimes of their own doing]. *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him"* (1 John 3:17)?

Grieve and mourn for Joseph's ruin—because we sometimes lose our way. Perils of purpose, forgetting our real reasons for existence, mislead and subvert the grand and glorious quest upon which the Savior sent us (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 2:10; Amos 6:6).

Pray that everywhere we will recall the purpose of the brotherhood: to be the pillar and the ground of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), the very body of the Lord (Eph. 5:23). Pray for the purity of the bride (Eph. 5:2). Cry for the spreading of the kingdom both within our souls and without (Luke 17:21).

Beseech the Lord that we may find and try to reach our great potential (Mark 4:30-32). Let us find the means to grow, to improve, to spread the saving word. The church, the brotherhood, are "the changed." May we be the means through which God's cleansing word still changes men.

Pray thanks to Heaven for the Christ, the purchase price to cleanse our sins-stains (Acts 20:28, etc.). Bless God for his perfect gift: our dear redeemer whose selflessness inspires us still (Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 5:8-9).

Pray for the brotherhood because of its place in God's design (Matt. 25:34). Pray for it ever to aspire to the perfection and beauty of holiness of its Creator's design (Psalm 96:9; Lam. 2:15).

Pray because our prayer is powerful (James 5:16-19). Pray because the Lord said "Pray" (Matt. 25:40; Phil. 4:6-8; Rom. 12:12, etc.) *"Again I say unto you,*

That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

Pray in Lord's name. *"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23).*

Pray in Faith. Prayer is the operative dynamic of our needs, the means of our desires.

⁵"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. ⁷For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. ⁸A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5-8).

Let us pray for this great assembly (Heb. 12:23). Let us pray with boldness (Heb. 10:19). Let us pray with fervor and with calm assurance that he who "began in us a work will perfect it." *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).* Let us pray with confidence and act upon our prayers. *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15).*

Conclusion

The prayers that we may offer now will not fall upon deaf ears. When we repent and then reform our lives before the Lord of Hosts, He waits to give us gifts untold. *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb. 4:16).

Brethren, let us pray.

Chapter 13

One Body **Galatians 3:26-29**

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Sincere gratitude is expressed to Charles Blair, the elders and each member of this sound and solid congregation for the invitation to participate in this good and great lectureship as I have done a number of times in the past. The theme this year, *Love The Brotherhood*, is a timely and much needed topic for our brethren. We may always increase our love for God's children and our brethren in the Lord. Paul commended the Thessalonians due to their increase of love [2 Thess. 1:3]. In the first epistle to them, and also his initial one in the New Testament, he commended their "*work of faith, and labour of love, and in patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father*" [1 Thess. 1:3].

"There is one body" — what a strong contrast to our pluralistic era in religion which prompts with vim and vigor the popular and pleasing concept of bodies many [cf. Eph. 4:4]. In fact, we would have to stretch many to comprehend all religious bodies, cults and occults. Addition on a daily basis is the name of the denominational game now played by men who seek to please themselves first and others second, rather than pleasing Deity.

Paul And The One Body

Of the eight New Testament penmen, Paul is the only scribe who employs the one body concept as an analogy of the Lord's church. He only does it in four

of his fourteen epistles — Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians. Strikingly powerful and profitable lessons can be gleaned from the Pauline usage of this analogous concept.

When Paul talked about the one church, he was speaking of the one body. When he spoke or wrote about the kingdom of Christ and of God, as he did in Ephesians 5:5, he was speaking of the one body. When he talked about the temple of God as he did in Ephesians 2:21,22, he was speaking of the one body. When he talked about the children of God, as he did in Galatians 3:26, he was speaking of the one body. When he wrote of the people of God, as he did in Romans 9:25, he was speaking of the one body. When he spoke of God's family or household, as he did in Ephesians 2:19; 3:15 and 1 Timothy 3:15, he was portraying the one body.

Paul's usage of the one body is inclusive of all who have heard, believed and obeyed the treasured truths of God's glorious Gospel. When he spoke of the one body, he did not mean less than one; he did not mean more than one; he MEANT ONE! The church universal constituted the one body; local congregations constituted the one body; congregations in an assembled state constituted the one body. On any Lord's Day all partakers of the one bread and the one cup in the aggregate compose the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16,17). There is a great unifying element permeating the Lord's Supper by Christians on a weekly and regular basis. We should not lose sight of this aspect of the communion. Paul never did and he did not want the Corinthians to lose sight of such either.

The One Body In Galatians 3:26-29

As suggested in our title, this is a good place to begin our in-depth contemplation of the one body, how it is entered, the beautiful blessings of such an

entrance, the composition of such and the unique unity of such. The passage reads,

26For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Redemption is conditional and positioned. The condition is obedience to the faith or to the Gospel. It is positioned IN Christ — not OUT of Him. The Galatians were not saved prior to their hearing, believing and obeying the Gospel. They were not saved until they entered Christ. They came into Him by the watery ordinance of baptism. The ASV renders Galatians 3:27 to read, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.*" Paul's logic here is razor sharp. In essence, he wrote, "You did if ye were! Did what? Put on Christ. If you were what? Were baptized into Him." The converse would be, "Ye did not put on Christ if it be the case that you were not baptized into Him."

There are no racial exclusions. Jews came into the one body by Gospel obedience. Gentiles came into the one body by obeying that very same Gospel. Peter made this crystal clear in Acts 15:11, "*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved even as they*" (Gentiles) (Parentheses added). There are no economic exclusions. Slaves were welcomed; so were the free. There are no gender exclusions. Both men and women are warmly welcomed (cf. Acts 5:14). All of the foregoing, when obedient to the word of the Lord, were "*one in Christ Jesus.*" This is truly unique oneness — the very

wonderful oneness for which Jesus prayed in John 17:20-23 and for which Paul pleaded in Ephesians 4:3-6.

Those bountifully blessed Galatians were Christ's, the spiritual seed of Abraham and heirs of God's precious promises.

Those obedient to the Gospel constitute the one body; those disobedient to the Gospel constitute NO part of this one body of beauty and blessings.

The One Body In Romans

Galatians and Romans were both Pauline products and were written about the same era of time. They touch similar themes of doctrinal study; they courageously complement each other. What Paul wrote the Galatians, he did not contradict within regal Romans. We have his own assurance that he wrote the same message to every church (1 Cor. 4:17). His was a message of strict uniformity. He did not vary his message to fit the whims and wishes of fickle humanity. Paul NEVER researched a virgin field of possible converts to see what they wanted in a church and then build one according to poll popularity. The mega churches of our day do this and our own liberal brethren are cypocats of the deepest dye and to the most slavish degree. Without quibble or question to the contrary they are a signal disgrace to the Cause of Christ.

In a duet of verses to Roman saints Paul penned words of wonder, wisdom and weight, *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: ⁵So we, being many, are one body in one Christ, and every one members one of another"* (Rom. 12:4,5). The powerful import of this attractive analogy is eloquently evident here. The human body is composed of many members. All members do not have the same office or role to fill. Eyes do not hear; ears do not walk; hands do not see;

feet do not hear, etc. Yet, there is a marvelous degree of unity in the human body with every part performing well its assigned task.

The church is one body in Christ. Note again where we are positioned — IN Christ — not OUT of Him. **We do not have the same roles to perform or the same station to assume. Yet, we are still the one body of Christ.** There is an intense interdependence permeating the body of the Lord or the church. Members depend upon elders and elders upon their flock. Deacons depend upon elders and the ones they serve. Members depend upon deacons as servants. Members depend upon preachers/teachers and those who instruct depend upon dedicated auditors of their proclaimed messages. No man is an island to himself if he be a member of the body of Christ. The members of the body depend upon God, Christ and the Spirit of holiness. Deity depends upon members of this one body to keep Heaven's Cause alive and prospering upon earth. We become the eyes, ears, mouths, feet and hands of God on earth doing the will of Christ.

Just who made up the body of Christ or the Lord's church in Rome? Both Jews and Greeks [Gentiles] did for a surety. Paul issued the theme of regal Romans in 1:16,17 and included both of these segments of Adam's race within the comprehension of God's great, good and glorious Gospel. Paul, preeminently, was the apostle to the Gentiles as he stressed in Romans 11:13 and yet, he made it a point to preach to Jews first and then to Gentiles as stated clearly in Romans 1:16,17. He followed this policy throughout the book of Acts preaching first in Jewish synagogues and then to the usually far more receptive Gentiles. He wrote this profound book to the called-out or to the saints of God at Rome (1:6,7). A number of the Roman saints are mentioned by name in Romans 16. This named list is inclusive of both men and women.

How had these people entered the one body or church? *They had not prayed their way into it.* For the alien sinner, prayer is NOT the key TO the kingdom of God; to the contrary, it is for those already citizens of the kingdom. *They had not been placed into it as babies;* infant baptism came in the apostasy from truth. *They had not been placed into it by grace alone minus any display of obedience on their part.* *They had not been placed into it by faith only or any other only ism.* *They surely had not been placed into it against their own will.* Voluntarily, they had submitted to the salvational demands of the Gospel of God's only begotten Son.

Totally like their counterparts in the large Asiatic province of Galatia, they had been baptized into the body of Christ [cf. Gal. 3:27]. As per Romans 6:3,4 they had been baptized into Christ, into His death and then had been raised to walk in newness of life. Then, and only then, did they enter the body of Christ, the church of Christ, the kingdom of the redeemed. Theirs was an "*obedience unto righteousness*" (Rom. 6:16). They had obeyed "*from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. ¹⁸Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*" (Rom. 6:17,18). Christ died; the Roman saints died to the love, practice and dominion of sin within their lives. Christ was buried in a tomb; they had been buried in the waters of baptism. Christ was raised; they had been raised from their tomb in water to walk in the newness of life. This, precisely, is how we duplicate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in the conversion process. Almost the whole religious Catholic and Protestant world has never understood and appreciated this precious process. Some of the ones who know it have never submitted to it which is amazingly amazing!

Obedience is strongly stressed in Romans 1:5; 6:17; 16:19 and 16:26. Yet Romans is a favorite book for the grace only and faith only crowds. The why of

their magnetic pull toward this wonderful book is quite baffling. It condemns them coming and going!

Much light is shed upon the one body or the one church within regal Romans. What a powerful and profitable book is profound Romans. No wonder it has challenged the most brilliant of religious minds for more than nineteen centuries now. It continues to do so and will on into the near and distant future if time continues to march on.

The One Body In 1 Corinthians

There is nothing but the holiest of harmony between what Paul wrote to the Corinthians and what he wrote the Galatians. Both of these books were written about the same time (A.D. 57 or 58), penned by the same apostolic hand and heart and inspired by the same Spirit of Holiness. What the Galatians did to get into Christ, the Corinthians did the very same — no more, no less. Blessings afforded the Galatians were likewise vouchsafed to the Corinthians.

We learn from Acts 18:8 that many of the Corinthians heard, believed and were baptized. Paul told them in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that they had all been "*baptized into one body.*" No bias was manifested since both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) as well as bond and free were received into the one body or the one church. Freely and fully they partook of the beautiful blessings of the one Spirit. The Corinthians knew whether they were in the one body or not in the one body. It was not that very evasive concept that many now hold.

Paul placed the Lord's supper in the body of Christ as per 1 Corinthians 10:16,17. Christ placed His table in His kingdom (Luke 22:29,30). To say that the church is unimportant is to say that what has been placed into it likewise is of no importance. Look at what this does to the Lord's Supper. But the Lord's Supper means but little to the masses of religious

men and women. Sadly, but true, the same can be said of far too many today who profess membership in the Lord's church. Missing it on the Lord's Day does not produce the least ripple in their surface discipleship concepts. Such really reflects on their concepts of Calvary since the Supper and His sufferings on Calvary cannot be severed.

The passage in 1 Corinthians 12:12 is a precious parallel to Romans 12:4,5. Paul did not teach the Romans any differently about the one body than he did Corinthian saints. The remainder of 1 Corinthians 12 is one of the boldest and brightest expositions of the body of Christ we have anywhere in the whole Bible. In fact, there is more stated about the body of Christ in this chapter than any other chapter in the Pauline writings. The human body is not one member but many members. Whether feet, eyes, ears, hands or whatever, each member is essential for the orderly functioning of the human body. The whole body is not an eye, an ear, a nose, a foot or hand. The human body would be a monstrosity if composed entirely of just eyes, ears, a nose, feet or hands. God did not so constitute the human body.

Members of the physical body cooperate in fundamental fashion, in wonderful workmanship. Eyes do not refuse to see because they do not walk as do the feet. Ears do not refuse to hear because they possess no smelling powers as does the nose. Feet do not refuse to walk because they cannot reach for things as do the hands. Feet enable a man to walk to his computer but his hands will push the necessary buttons for desired information or communications by E-Mail.

Members of the physical body possess no jealousy or envy toward other members. The less comely does not envy the more comely. The less honored is not jealous over the more honored. Break one arm and the other does not go on strike until the fracture is made well again. Some years ago I received a broken

bone and had to have my left hand and arm in a cast for nearly two months. During the recovery period the right hand did not refuse to do the work of both hands simply because one was largely incapacitated. But the right hand rejoiced the day the cast was removed and the left begin to function again. Break one leg and the good leg does not go on strike and refuse to transport the body till the broken limb is healed again.

Lessons from the attractive and accurate analogy are practical, pointed and powerful. The body of Christ is not one member but many. All are not Bible Class teachers; all are not Gospel preachers in a public sort of way; all are not workers with children and youth; all are not elders or deacons. There are many roles to fill and works to accomplish. Marvelous unity, NEVER a word or work of jealousy and envy, should characterize the one body or the church of the Christ in a given locality.

There should be no schism in the body. So commanded Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:25. Members of the physical body do not war against each other. Members of the one body of Christ, likewise, should not be a feuding, fighting and frustrated people. Sensitive indeed should be the care extended to each other. When one saint suffers, all other fellow servants should suffer with him/her. When one member rejoices, all other fellow saints should rejoice with him/her. Yet, sadly, it frequently is the case that we reverse this Pauline counsel. We rejoice over those suffering, feeling they are receiving their just dues; we suffer over those who rejoice wondering why it happened to them and not to us — the much more deserving! When such is the case, our spirituality is at a very low ebb indeed. We desperately need an overhaul job spiritually.

The Corinthian saints had been given spiritual gifts. Yet, they had become misfits in the administrat-ing of such. Paul wrote three chapters, 1 Corinthians

12,13,14, in seeking to clear up the mass confusion and unjustified misuse triggered by such infractions. He names the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12; he deals with their duration in 1 Corinthians 13; he regulates them in 1 Corinthians 14. We do not possess these nine spiritual gifts today but there are principles set forth in these three powerful chapters much needed in the one body of Christ now. Natural gifts can be misused now as spiritual gifts were then. A lack of unity, caring and sensitivity can characterize us now even as it did for them in the first century. In view of such, how rich indeed are 1 Corinthians 12,13,14.

The One Body In Ephesians

In our present arrangement of New Testament books, Galatians and Ephesians are back-to-back. There are no jarring disharmonies between the two epistles and the twelve chapters they contain — six in each marvelous missive.

Ephesians is Paul's marvelous masterpiece relative to the church. People, knowledgeable toward Ephesians, will possess one of the best portraits of the Lord's church delineated anywhere in Holy Writ. Those who read with relish, believe with beauty and follow with fervency what Paul wrote about the one body or the one church will NEVER have any confusion of mind relative to the rightness of the true church and the wrongness of pseudo churches begun and sustained by men. Change Agents who seek to make the church into just another denomination have rejected in totality the whole scope of Paul's Ephesian masterpiece on the church. Their concept of the church and Paul's concept of it are as wide apart as are the poles and then some.

Ephesian saints heard, believed, repented, confessed and were immersed into Christ as per Acts 19. This is precisely how they came into the body of Christ.

To be in the one body is to be in Christ. But all spiritual blessings are in Christ [Eph. 1:3]. The subsequent verses delineate what these spiritual blessings were/are. Hence, all spiritual blessings are in the one body or in the one church. This is where they are positioned — IN the body, not OUT of the one body. They are IN the one church — not OUT of the one church. Minus question or quibble to the contrary, salvation is surely one of the spiritual blessings. Surely, it is in the one body or the one church. This answers once and for all time whether one can be saved separate and apart from the church. HE CANNOT BE!

The final two verses of Ephesians I read, "*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. ²³Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all*" [vs.22,23].

Christ is the Sovereign of the Universe; He is head over all things to the church as well. The church is a divine monarchy — not a democracy with every man's having the right to dictate preferred patterns and policies. Jesus Christ is in the driver's seat — not Change Agents in Nashville, Abilene, Tulsa, etc. He is in the driver's seat — not the mega church builders scattered around the country.

The church is His body. That makes it as special to Him as any possession can be to Deity. Men minimize the church but Christ has given it maximum emphasis. It is the very fullness of Him that fills all in all. This is a vastly important declaration. The Lord's church in Paul's era was the very fullness of Christ. Can one get anything fuller than full? If so, how, How, HOW? That being the case, there is NO room for any other thing fuller subsequently. That reduces all man-made churches to utter worthlessness as far as Christ is concerned. He did not build a single one of them; He heads NONE of them; He will save NONE of them. One day they all will be rooted up as per Matthew

15:13. As the late and lamented Keeble often said, "You had better get out of such before 'rootin-up' time comes!" Keeble was true to the teaching of this verse; Change Agents are not! Were Keeble alive today, he would be deeply ashamed of every Change Agent among us whether in his beloved Nashville or any other location. Change Agents preach an entirely different message than the gospel Keeble proclaimed so ably, eloquently and effectively.

In Ephesians 3:6 Paul made quite clear that *"the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."* We are not IN Christ unless we are in His body or His church. The same obedient process that places us into Christ also places us into His body wherein salvation alone is attained.

The one body enjoys kingly kinship in Ephesians 4:3-6. It is part and parcel of *"the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (v.3). It keeps glorious company with the One Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism and the one God and Father of all (vs.4-6). We dare not put a zero where Paul put one; we dare not make plural what Paul left as singular. Yet daring men have changed that one into an innumerable many. There is no fear of God in their hearts and lives as they have done this (Rom. 3:18).

The one body comes in for eloquent emphasis again in Ephesians 5. In verse 23 we read of Christ's headship over His church and that He *"is the saviour of the body."* But His body is His church as affirmed in Ephesians 1:22,23. This but means that He is the Saviour of His church — not Luther's, not Calvin's, not Wesley's, etc. Those who declare that salvation has no link at all with the church exhibit how very, Very, VERY little they think of Christ and His church. They might as well state that Christ has no connection with salvation. He and His church cannot be severed. In Ephesians 5:32 Paul spoke of "Christ and

the church." He did not speak of Christ minus His church; he did not speak of the church minus the Christ. He did not say Christ OR the church. He said Christ AND the church, period!

In verse 30, Paul again affirms that *"we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."*

Your body is precious to you. So is mine to me. But far greater is the precious tie Jesus Christ maintains toward the church.

The One Body In Colossians

Colosse was just to the west of the cities in Galatia where Paul preached and to whom he addressed in the Galatian letter. He put nothing in Colossians that jars with any precept or principle vouchsafed to the Galatians.

Colossians and Ephesians are twin epistles in the New Testament. Both were penned by the same apostolic hand and at about the same time. There are a number of striking similarities in the two books. They complement each other. Ephesians speaks of the church of Christ while Colossians speaks of the Christ of the church. Since Paul had so much to say of the one body in Ephesians, we would expect more of the same in the dynamic development of the apostolic missive to Colossian Christians. In this we are not disappointed in the least.

A stately tribute is given the Christ in Colossians 1:15-17 — one of the most beautiful in all the Bible. That treasured tribute continues on into verse 18 wherein we read, *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."* This valiant verse is richly reminiscent of Ephesians 1:22,23. Both there and here the headship of Christ over His church is stressed and stressed with apostolic force and fervency. There is NO bashing of the church by Paul, either here or

elsewhere in his writings, such as we hear from blatant Change Agents today. Were Paul here today, he would have nothing in common with these Change Agents who seek to restructure the church into a regular Protestant denomination.

Both in Ephesians 1:22,23 and in Colossians 1:18 we have the body and the church as one and the same. Those who minimize the church minimize the body of Christ. Those who minimize the body of Christ minimize that which Christ heads and for which He shed His precious blood at Calvary. Those who say the church is unimportant declare how little they value that for which Christ attaches the supremacy of value.

In verse 24 Paul has more to say about the church or the body of Christ. The passage reads, *"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."*

The church is costly. It cost Christ His life. It cost the Father the self-imposed absence of Christ from heaven for a full third of a century. It was costly to its first members. Stephen gave his life for Christ and the church. The early disciples were scattered abroad due to their undying loyalty to Christ and His body or the church. Sacrificial loyalty to Christ and His church cost all the apostles, save John, their very lives as martyrs. Paul suffered much for Christ and the church. He alluded to such in Colossians 1:24. He was not a reluctant sufferer but a very worthy, wonderful and willing one. Great passages about his wonderful willingness to suffer for Christ and His church are found in Acts 9:23-30; 21:13; 1 Cor. 15:31,32; 2 Cor. 11:24ff; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:10; 3:11-13 and 4:14-18. We are made to wonder how many of the Change Agents would risk limb and life for Christ and His church or His one body as did Paul. Bashing it and dying for it are not compatible in the least.

Paul mentioned the one body in Colossians 3:15. The passage states, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*" They had not been called into a Roman body, a Grecian body, a philosophical body, a political body, a Pharisaic body, a Judaizing body, a Sadducean body, an Epicurean body or a Stoic body. They had been called into the one body of Christ or the one church of the Lord. The call came by the marvelous means of God's glorious Gospel. From Peter we learn that God's people in that first century had been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God's word (1 Peter 2:9). It also is of significance to realize that the word from which church is translated in the New Testament is *ekklesia* which means "the called out."

Conclusion

A thorough study of the one body of Christ in the New Testament on should impress on all of us how much His body means to God the Father, to God the Son, to God the Holy Spirit and how much that great, good and glorious body of Christ should mean to all of us.

Chapter 14

Refusing To Surrender

Galatians 2:4-5

Paul Sain

Of the many treasured blessings associated in the work of a Gospel preacher, without doubt, one of the sweetest is the fellowship with those of like precious faith during faithful lecture series. Thank you dear brethren for this study on the theme, "*Love The Brotherhood.*" Thank you for your faithful proclamation and defense of the inspired powerful Word of God. Your influence for good reaches throughout much of the world.

My Declaration!

The author of the following is unknown to me. I would eagerly give credit to whom credit is due. But the words express my hearts deepest feelings and I wish to utilize them as a springboard into our lesson on this urgent topic.

I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus.

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure.

I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees,

colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chincy giving, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotion, plaudits, or popularity.

I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my Guide is reliable, my mission is clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or slow up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus.

I must go 'till I drop,' preach all that I know, and work 'till He comes.'

And when He comes to get His own, He'll have no trouble recognizing me. My colors are clear.

—*Author Unknown*

God's people have been in a "fight" with the devil and his servants from the beginning...and will unto the end of time. Without question, we must chart our course toward the heavenly goal and not look back [Luke 9:57-62]. We must not allow the pleasures of sin to entice us [Heb. 11:24-26]. If we are to reach that beautiful rest, we must not allow the world to snare us and cause us to forsake our Saviour [2 Tim. 4:10]. If our final abode is to be with the righteous of all ages, our friends and family cannot be an overpowering negative influence on us. Our love and our life must be Jesus Christ and Him crucified [1 Cor.

2:2; Gal. 2:20). Like the apostle Paul we can, with bold confidence, declare:

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:13).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).

...I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21).

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day (Acts 23:1).

The victory can be yours! The victory can be mine (1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Tim. 4:6-8)! We must press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling (Phil. 3:14).

The World In Which We Live

Sin, wickedness and moral corruption abound all around us! There have been additional times in the history of mankind in which man found himself consumed in evil. We recall, no doubt, the reaction of our Heavenly Father to the wickedness that existed during the time of Noah. The Scriptures emphatically declare:

⁵And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. ⁷And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them (Gen. 6:5-7, emp mine, ps).

Inhabitants of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were so corrupt and wicked. God's description and words of condemnation are terrifying.

Corinth was a city known for her prostitutes and fleshly, sinful lifestyle. Paul spoke about the previous condition of some who were then followers of Christ (1 Cor. 6:11).

God has always been selective in everything He has done. But man's attitude toward God's selective way has most often been rebellion. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3). The people of Noah's day knew God's will but rejected it (Gen. 6) Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, knew God's specifications, but chose to offer strange fire (Lev. 10:1-2).

The world today diligently endeavors to distract, discourage and defeat us. They want us to falter and fall in serving Jesus Christ. They know this can be accomplished by getting us to talk, dress, conduct our lives, and go places like the rest of the world.

Surely we remember the admonitions of the following passages concerning our relationship with the world:

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. ²And be

not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God [Rom. 12:1-2, emp. mine, ps].

¹⁵**Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.** If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever [1 John 2:15-17].

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that **the friendship of the world is enmity with God?** whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God [James 4:4].

This world is not our home. We are merely pilgrims and sojourners here [Heb. 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11]. Christ instructed us to lay up treasures in heaven [Matt. 6:19-21]. Paul taught us to set our affections on things above [Col. 3:1f].

Note the following two exhortations from Paul:

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them [Eph. 5:11].

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you [2 Cor. 6:17].

The world in which we live is largely evil. But we must not allow the evil to get into our lives.

The Bride Of Christ Is Under Attack!

Our Lord purchased the church with His shed blood [Acts 20:28]. He presented her a glorious bride, without spot or blemish [Eph. 5:25-28]. We are charged with maintaining the purity of the church [James 1:27]. Instruction has been given in the Holy Word whereby we are to keep the church pure [2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:9-10].

If I were the devil and desperately wanted to defeat Christianity I would promote sin and selfishness. I would likewise encourage all to believe one way is as good as another. I would convince any and all to pursue what makes them feel good, giving in to their personal whims and fancies. I would strive to divide brethren, even creating dissension and feuds where battle lines should not be drawn. I would fervently seek division among even faithful brethren, those of like precious faith.

Denominationalism is still rampaging around us at this time. Man continues to devise new doctrines which damage and destroy the doctrine of Christ in the hearts of many. In our local area in Tennessee we have one group who has started three different churches (using the term as the world defines it) in the last decade. In the 50's public debates were conducted which exposed the false doctrines of man. During that time our denominational friends believed what they believed with such intensity that they willingly stepped up to the podium and defended their doctrines. No longer is this true throughout our land. Even more tragically, many brethren would not support such public defenses of the faith if it were conducted.

Of even greater concern is the massive attacks being made upon the precious bride of Christ, the church of our Lord, **from within**. "*Change Agents*" are endeavoring to restructure the church into noth-

ing more nor less than a man-made denomination. They claim that we **MUST** change with the times and not only our methods but doctrines as well.

Let's quickly look at a few general actions and teachings of "*change agents*" today:

Unity in diversity.

Inspiration of the Bible denied.

Lord's supper perverted.

Women's role in the church distorted.

Elders authority disregarded/overrun.

Fellowship to those outside of Christ.

Marriage, divorce and remarriage perversions.

Instrumental music in worship accepted.

Special music: choirs, quartets, dramas.

Pattern theology rejected/ridiculed.

Don't call names; just teach positive things.

Evolution: theistic and atheistic

Situation ethic/immorality

Lest you might feel that we were being too generic, and not proving our point, let us now note a few **SPECIFIC EVENTS/TEACHINGS**

False statements — *"There are sincere, devout, knowledgeable Christians in all denominations."* Infamous statement made by Rubel Shelly in 1983 in Centerville, TN.

"The Church of Christ is a big, sick denomination." Lynn Anderson made the statement in the 70's and has not withdrawn or corrected it.

"We do not contribute one whit to our salvation. It is by grace only." *"It is a monstrosity to say that baptism is part of the plan of salvation."* *"The church must change...."* The teachings of Rubel Shelly several months ago.

Atonement service — Hendersonville Community Church, September 21, 1996. *"The Shepherds have given their blessing for us to celebrate the Day of Atonement again. This year ... To prepare our*

hearts and minds for this celebration, we will have the Lamb's Book of Life for everyone to sign again. It will be taken into the Holy of Holies by two of our Shepherds on the night of the service."

Community worship service — April 10, 1994 at the Woodmont Christian Church building, including Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist and the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ. Rubel Shelly spoke. [I have listened to this "worship" assembly, with instruments of music, as well as fellowship being extended to those outside of Christ.]

Sinner's prayer salvation — Max Lucado via radio, December, 1996 taught that what one must do to be saved is merely pray the sinner's prayer [as it has been known for years]. The entire tape is available, but the following is word-for-word of this section of his message: *"...all you have to do is to call Him Father. Just call Him Father. Just turn your heart to Him even right now as I am speaking. Call Him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don't you do that?"* After a prayer and announcements, Max came back on the air with the following: *"...I'd like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church. I want to encourage you to be baptized. I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved...."*

Instrumental music in worship service — At Jubilee 1998, last July, during the evening service in which Jeff Walling spoke, there was instrumental music. The problem that raises it ugly head generation after generation — but in years past, the battle was fought against mechanical instruments of music with the denominational world. Now we have some foolish brethren who are advocating this matter is NOT a test of fellowship. Has Judges 2:10 come true again in our generation?

Woman leading singing — At Jubilee 1998, last July, a woman [with children on stage] lead the worship in song. Some congregations are advancing the role of women into leadership activities. A few have aggressively taught women can lead, direct, oversee the work of the Lord just as men.

Mayberry vs. God's Word — Several congregations [Alabama and Tennessee] have resorted to The Andy Griffith Show to fill the previous Bible class time. Regardless of the love many of us have for this show and its decent morals, it does not replace the powerful Word of God [Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12].

Willow Creek Imitators — J. Wayne Kilpatrick and others have gone to Willow Creek [denomination] and brought back rave reviews of how they are growing a church. Has the power of the Gospel been lost? What does the Bible tell us will draw all men to Him [John 12:32; Heb. 4:12]?

Fellowship With Known, Marked False Teachers — Some congregations, universities, workshops, etc. continue to extend invitations and the right hand of fellowship to those who have taught and continue to teach false doctrines. Jeff Walling, Joe Beam, Rubel Shelly, etc. have boldly declared themselves as ones who no longer seek the "*old paths*" but rather seek to restructure the church. The audio and video tapes clearly show their position. Yet, David Lipscomb University, Jubilee, and many congregations continue to support and encourage them. What does 2 John 9-11 teach?

Special Day Celebration: Easter, Baby Dedication, Christmas — Following denominational leads, there are brethren who celebrate these days as holy days - though without scriptural authority.

The charge is often made by defenders of the change agents: we should love one another, get along with our religious neighbors, put aside our doctrinal differences, it was "*love*" by which our Lord said the world would know if we are His disciples.

Certainly it is TRUE that we are to "love" one another. John 13:35 certainly says it is by love that the world will know we are His disciples. But with absolute certainty we can likewise know that we love the Lord by keeping His commands (John 14:15); we love the church by following the explicit and implicit demands of our Lord for the saved (the church); we love the lost by helping them see, learn and obey the truth that has the power to save them (John 8:32); we love our erring brethren by endeavoring to restore them (Gal. 6:1-2). It is further true that we totally fail to show love for our religious friends when we keep our mouths shut and allow them to continue on their road to eternal destruction (per the exact statements of the Lord, Matt. 15:7ff).

Unity Is Possible!

Some possibly feel that unity is impossible in our modern age. Such is not true, but a lie of the devil. **Unity is possible** when we respect the prayer of our Lord (John 17:20-21). **Unity is possible** when we reject all human opinions over God's Word (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12). **Unity is possible** when we discard all religions of man (Matt. 15:7f; Gal. 1:6-9). **Unity is possible** when we believe there is ONE God, ONE Saviour, ONE way of salvation, ONE baptism which results in remission of sins, ONE church in which salvation is found (Eph. 4:3-6). **Unity is possible** when we believe and follow "the" way of our Lord completely (2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 14:6; Matt. 7:13-14); the same rule (Phil. 3:16; Amos 3:3).

We Must Never Give Up

This cartoon should well represent our devotion and tenacious determination to hold to the "old



Don't ever give up!

paths,” the “old Jerusalem gospel” until our last breath has been drawn.

Crude as this may seem, but it surely conveys the absolute certainty of our commitment to the Lord. Like Paul, we must say *“to live is Christ, and to die is gain”* (Phil. 1:21). We must not fear ones who can take our life physically (Matt. 10:28), but only be concerned about faithful enduring to the end (Rev. 2:10).

You Must Not Quit!

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're traveling seems all uphill,
When your spirit is low, and troubles are nigh,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Often the goal is nearer than
It seems to a faint and faltering man.
And you never can tell how close you are
It may be near, when it seems afar.
So stick to the fight, when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't
quit!

—Unknown author

Paul To The Galatian Brethren

The beloved Paul stated:

*⁴And that because of false brethren un-
awares brought in, who came in privily to
spy out our liberty which we have in Christ
Jesus, that they might bring us into bond-
age: ⁵To whom we gave place by subjection,
no, not for an hour; that the truth of the
gospel might continue with you (Gal. 2:4-5).*

The church was in existence, but "*false*" brethren crept in and sought to destroy faithful followers of Christ. Paul said "*not for an hour*" did we give them an opportunity to wield their devastation.

Later in this same epistle this same faithful soldier wrote:

*¹Stand fast therefore in the liberty where-
with Christ hath made us free, and **be not
entangled again** with the yoke of bondage.*

*²Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be
circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.*

*³For I testify again to every man that is
circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the
whole law. ⁴Christ is become of no effect
unto you, whosoever of you are justified by
the law; **ye are fallen from grace** [Gal. 5:1-
4].*

In the first century some followers of Christ (Christians) fell from grace. Today, Christians also fall from grace. We must constantly be on guard lest we fall away. Paul buffeted his body, to keep it in subjection, lest he might fall away (1 Cor. 9:27).

Further to the elders at Ephesus, whom he had called to Miletus, Paul charged:

*²⁸**Take heed** therefore unto yourselves, and
to all the flock, over the which the Holy
Ghost hath made you overseers, to **feed the
church of God**, which he hath purchased
with his own blood. ²⁹**For I know this**, that
after my departing shall **grievous wolves
enter in among you**, not sparing the flock.
³⁰Also of your own selves shall men arise,
speaking perverse things, to draw away
disciples after them. ³¹Therefore **watch**, and
remember, that by the space of three years
I ceased not to warn every one night and*

*day with tears. ³²And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to **the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified** [Acts 20:28-32].*

These specific words of instruction are so relevant to the church of our day. How wonderful to know the Scriptures, inspired of God, are always pertinent.

What Can We Do?

Brethren, may I offer the following suggestions, based on the Word of God? I challenge you to diligently pursue these desperately needed actions.

Hear the instruction of God. Ask for the “old paths” [Jer. 6:16]. Preach the Word [2 Tim. 4:2], and not the doctrines of man [Matt. 15:7-9]. Follow God, not what seems right to man [Prov. 14:12].

Know the enemy! Satan, the devil, is the enemy. He is the adversary who walks about seeking whom he may devour [1 Peter 5:8]. He is the wicked one [Matt. 13:19,38]; the father of lies [John 8:44]; the god of this world [2 Cor. 4:4]; the prince of this world [John 14:30; 12:3].

Feed on the Word. To accomplish this, the local congregation needs solid Bible-based pulpit teaching, sound Bible-based class material, faithful publications and magazines coming to the church library and into our homes.

We are to hunger and thirst for righteousness [Matt. 5:6]. All must study to be approved of God [2 Tim. 2:15]. Christians are admonished to grow in the knowledge of the Lord [2 Peter 3:18].

Elders must feed, oversee, warn, guard the flock. They must keep themselves informed and keep the congregation informed of current threats in the brotherhood. Be aware and beware!

The instruction to elders are frightening: Feed the flock (Acts 20:28); tend the flock (1 Peter 5:2); take care of the church (1 Tim. 3:5); watch for the souls (Heb. 13:17); exhort and convince (Titus 1:9); stop the mouths (Titus 1:11); and mark teachers of false doctrines (Rom. 16:17).

Draw the line of fellowship cleanly between darkness and light. Refuse to bid godspeed to evil (2 John 9-11). Recognize those who bring in another Gospel is accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). By inspiration Paul said to have no fellowship with darkness (Eph. 5:11) and for the faithful to be separate from them (2 Cor. 6:17). We are to reject enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18).

Support faithful brethren — encourage one another — Jude wrote to encourage and exhort others to "contend" for the faith (Jude 3). Paul pled with Timothy to war a good warfare and keep that which is committed (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 6:20). He further said to hold fast to sound words (2 Tim. 1:13) and watch, endure, and do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

Endure to the end — Be faithful unto death and we will receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10), if we have not grown weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). We must endure to the end (Matt. 10:22). Like Paul, we must have fought, finished and kept in order to receive the crown that awaits the faithful (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

A Warning From The Past

I close this lesson with the following from F. B. Srygley, **Gospel Advocate**, 1928.

Fighting for the truth is almost a lost art. Men who are enjoying the benefits of the gospel unmixed with human error, are enjoying these benefits because our fathers fought for the truth. Every inch of ground from that mysterious way of being saved, which was

better felt than told, to the plain conditions of pardon as taught in the New Testament, was fought out for us by our fathers.

If someone before us had not fought for the truth, most of us might yet be in the fog of denominational teaching. This is not the time to temporize or make friends with error.

Chapter 15

Solving Problems Among Brethren

Acts 6:1-7

Garland M. Robinson

I can hardly think of a more needed study among the Lord's people than this one. All I have talked to on this subject, without exception, have expressed great interest in it.

People everywhere have problems. Brethren have problems. Problems cause division. Sometimes the division is warranted, many times it is not; but none the less, brethren divide. Jesus prayed that it not be so among his disciples. ²⁰*“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; ²¹That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”* (John 17:20-21).

Many factors enter the picture when it comes to problems and solving them. However, there is only one right way to solve problems, the Lord's Way. Ignoring them or sweeping them under the rug is not solving them. Compromising the Truth in order to get along is not solving them. When brethren go through life and never solve their problems, we may rest assured the Lord will solve them at the judgment. Surely, no righteous person desires they be resolved this way? Then, it will be too late for at least one of the sides and perhaps both sides of a problem. The rich man saw that the other side of death was too late to make changes (Luke 16:19-31). Cry as he may, he

could not change the fact that he was in torments. He could not go back to earth and make amends. He could not correct the wrongs he had committed nor the benevolent acts he neglected. It was too late!

The text of our study has been assigned as...

Acts 6:1-7

¹And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. ²Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. ³Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. ⁴But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. ⁵And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: ⁶Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. ⁷And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The early church had been enjoying peace and prosperity as is recorded in chapters 3-5 of Acts. Now, a situation arose which posed a threat to their unity. Their peace and harmony was in jeopardy of being broken and destroyed.

The number of the disciples was increasing greatly. From the church's beginning with about 3,000 in Acts 2:42, the brethren numbered five thousand men by Acts 4:4. *"And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women"* [Acts 5:14]. Many were poor and needed help. Those who were able, assisted those who had need of food, clothes and shelter [Acts 4:34-37].

In Acts 6:1 we learn brethren were caring for one another daily by supplying food and necessities for needy widows. They were busy seeing to the needs of members and those who had want. From this account we learn there are occasions where "soup kitchens" are necessary to provide for the needy.

As population increases, more problems arise. This is true in regards to any culture or situation. The more people in a congregation, the greater potential for problems among them. As a result, Acts 6:1 says murmuring, complaining, whispering, etc. arose, particularly among the women. Something needed to be done.

To add to the problem at hand, brethren became divided along "class" or "ethnic" distinctions (6:1). The Grecians were Jews of foreign birth—Hellenists. Even if they were not from foreign lands they were of Greek descent and habit. The Hebrews were those who did not have the influence of outside cultures and were neglecting those of Greek influence. The solution was for everyone to be treated fairly. But their favoritism prevented that.

Prejudices for whatever reasons ought to be non-existent among God's people. The church is a melting pot of every culture, background, language, age and color. *"For there is no respect of persons with God"* [Rom. 2:11] and neither should we be found guilty of it. *"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons"* [James 2:1]. *"But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as trans-*

gressors" (James 2:9). Many other verses show this to be true (Acts 10:34-35; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; James 2:1-9; 1 Peter 1:17).

The problem of neglect and partiality was approached with promptness (6:2). As soon as the situation became known to the apostles, they set out to correct the problem. The apostles, being wise and sound men, called the disciples together and appointed that seven men be chosen to handle the situation (6:3). It was good that the brethren, not the apostles, select the ones from among themselves to handle this situation. The apostles simply prescribed the qualifications that such men should meet. Exactly "how" these men were chosen is not given. Whether it was by vote or balloting or if there were nominees chosen first, we simply are not told. It appears this should be left up to the good judgment by each congregation.

This issue was something the apostles could delegate for other sound and sober men to handle (6:3). "*It is not reason*," meaning it is not pleasing or agreeable, it is not fit or proper for the apostles to leave the work of preaching and teaching the Word. They had a greater work to do than serve tables (v.2). It's not that they considered themselves too good to stoop to such menial tasks, but, they had the knowledge, experience, expertise, responsibility, ability to work in matters where they were most qualified. They should not neglect or abandon the work of preaching the Word. Their primary responsibility was in giving themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (6:4). The great work of evangelizing was not to be hindered. Any time there is a problem among brethren, precious time is taken away from preaching the Gospel.

Every member of the church has at least one talent (cf. Matt. 25:14-30). Each one must use what they have and never begrudge others for what they are able to do. It takes all in the Lord's church to

make a vibrant, living body to function as it should. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 make this abundantly clear. We would do well to read these chapters often.

¹⁴“For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? ... ²¹And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. ²²Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary” [1 Cor. 12:14-17,21,22].

There were others who could handle the task of “serving tables.” Three qualifications were given in selecting those to take care of this problem. They must be men of “honest report,” “full of the Holy Ghost” and full of “wisdom” (v.3).

1) *They were to be of honest or good report.* They would be known by their reputation among the saints as well as those outside the Lord’s church as being fair, impartial, respectable men of integrity. Honesty and integrity are virtues desperately needed today. Many verses teach us to be honest and deal honestly with all men (Rom. 12:17; 13:13; 2 Cor. 8:21; 13:7; 1 Thess. 4:12; Heb. 13:18; 1 Peter 2:12). We need more honest and good men who will mediate between brethren to help solve differences and difficulties.

2) *Being full of the Holy Spirit* could either have reference to their ability to work miracles (which was given them through the laying on of the apostles

hands, Acts 8:18), in which case would show evidence of their faithfulness in the Lord; or, it may simply have reference to their submission to the teaching of the Holy Spirit (I believe the latter is the correct understanding). This would be evidenced by them exemplifying the fruits of the Spirit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-25). Such individuals would therefore be walking by the Spirit; i.e., living by and according to the teaching of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1,4). Either way, they would be men of character and integrity to be chosen to such a noble and worthy task.

3) Being *full of wisdom* would show they possessed that practical good sense and judgment which would enable them to make fair and just decisions in accomplishing the work of the Lord. Wisdom has been spoken of as “applied knowledge.” Knowing the right ways of the Lord, they would have the good sense to apply that knowledge in a useful way to benefit the brethren, get the job done, while at the same time satisfying the Lord. There are often complicated problems to be worked through in relationships between brethren. Level-headed men are desperately needed to help settle these differences. They have the ability to see through the clutter and get to the heart of the matter. They would be more concerned with coming to a just solution to satisfy the Lord and His glorious work than they would be petting the feelings of those involved. However, they are able to use wisdom in carrying out the solution that would be the best for both sides in a disagreement. For those who love the Lord and His church, their desire is to bring glory to God and the advancement of His Cause. Each will gladly submit to the just judgment of honest and fair brethren who mediate such affairs.

Prayer

Prayer was a vital part in solving the problem. When the seven men had been chosen they were

"...set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (6:6). When brethren pray together, great things can be accomplished. Prayer can soothe the tensions and strain of relationships. We petition God's help through his Word. We must not underestimate prayer.

Jesus prayed often (Luke 3:21; Matt. 14:23; 26:36; Mark 1:35). He teaches us to always pray and not give up (Luke 18:1). We find the apostles doing just that in Acts 6. They must continue preaching and praying. So should we.

Accept The Solution

The brethren accepted the proposal set forth by the apostles to solve this threat to unity. No record exists that they continued to murmur or complain. They all hastened to comply with the solution. The result was that the Word of God increased (6:7). Faith was strengthened. Hurt feelings subsided. Brotherly love continued (cf. Heb. 13:1). People obeyed the Gospel and continued in their walk with the Master. There is no way of knowing the number of those who obeyed. The text simply says, *"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith"* (v.7). Such a condition prevails when unity and peace reigns in our hearts.

Division generates strife and wastes great amounts of energy that could otherwise be spent on advancing the Cause of the Lord. Every moment spent in quarreling, backbiting and devouring one another (cf. Gal. 5:15), multiplies many fold in wasted time that could be used to build, strengthen and support. However, we must still handle the problem.

The seven chosen had to be spiritually minded men to work with those involved. Their task was to solve the problem among the brethren. McGarvey

points out that the seven listed in verse five were Greek names and suggests “the men were selected from the very party whence the murmuring had proceeded.” There was no selfishness shown or partyism exhibited. Both sides trusted these men could and would handle the problem, which they did in fine fashion. This should serve as a splendid example for us today when problems arise among us.

It is also interesting to note that two of these men, Philip and Stephen, are mention later as preachers of the Gospel [Acts 6:9–8:40]. Preachers can and should help brethren work through trying times and difficult situations. Each must have a willingness to help and be helped.

The Word Of God Increased

As a result of their solving the problem that arose among them and the subsequent unity enjoyed, we read *“and the word of God increased”* [Acts 6:7]. This is simply another way of saying that the preaching of the Gospel continued. More and more people had opportunity to hear the unsearchable riches of Christ. The Gospel had its intended effects on the hearts and lives of those who obeyed it. The preaching of the Word was successful.

Notice how it is mentioned of the “word of God” increasing. It is not said that the Holy Spirit operated directly on the hearts of people. Noting is said of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. No mention is made of the Holy Spirit coming down and taking control of peoples lives. All of these are foreign expressions to the Holy Bible. However, they are common statements in the lives of many today — those who have been sold the lie of Calvinism. Such people wait for a working of the Holy Spirit to come over them. But, they wait in vain. That’s not the way the Spirit works. He works through His Word. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all*

wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" [Col. 3:16]

Biblical terminology and expression is simply, "*the word of God increased.*" As unity prevailed, the Word was preached, people listened, the Word had its affect, people obeyed and lives were changed. This is the same way it is done today.

"The Faith" Is To Be Obeyed

The word "faith" is used in at least two senses in the Scriptures. To fail to recognize this causes one to err in his understanding and appropriate use of God's Word. Sometimes "faith" has reference to one's personal faith such as Hebrews 11:6 where it is said it is impossible to please God without faith; or, Mark 16:16 where Jesus said "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" In many other places, the word "faith" is used in reference to the Gospel [New Testament Law, cf. Rom. 8:2] which is God's "system," "rule" or "law of faith." It is so used in Acts 13:8; 14:22; 16:5; 24:24; 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 1:23; 2:16; 3:23; Eph. 4:5,13; Jude 3 and many, many more. It is called the "law of faith" in Romans 3:27.

A great many who were among the priests of the Jewish temple worship were "*obedient to the faith*" [Acts 6:7]. This is equivalent to saying that they "obeyed the Gospel," became Christians or were baptized. All are synonymous terms. Such expressions as this are found on at least two other occasions. "*By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name*" [Rom. 1:5]. "*But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting*

*God, made known to all nations for the **obedience of faith***" (Rom. 16:26).

One obeys the faith by yielding to or complying to its demands. This is simply another way of saying one "obeys the Gospel" such as in Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and 1 Peter 4:17. Without obedience to the Faith, the Gospel, one cannot be saved. These verses make clear that the vengeance and wrath of God will fall upon those who "obey not the gospel."

Obedience to the Gospel involves certain "steps" or "acts" to perform. One must have **faith**, or **belief** in the Gospel and Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; Acts 8:37; Heb. 11:6). One must **repent** of all their sins — change the mind, attitude, thinking (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). One must **confess** faith in Jesus that He is the Son of God (Matt. 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10). One must be **baptized** (immersed) in water for the remission (forgiveness) of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-6,17-18; 1 Peter 3:21). Water baptism is the new birth of which Jesus spake with Nicodemus (John 3:3-5). Water baptism puts one into the body (church) of the Lord (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13). All the saved are in the church (Acts 2:41,47). The church is the body of the saved (Eph. 5:23). One must **continue faithful** in the Lord unto death, even if faithfulness costs one their life (Rev. 2:10; Matt. 10:22; 1 Cor. 15:58; Heb. 10:23).

Problems Among Brethren Today

Oh, how we wish we could get brethren to seriously think about their situation and work to correct it. We should make every attempt to be at peace, not only among brethren, but with all men. Paul said, "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men*" (Rom. 12:18). "*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and*

things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). "...Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, **live in peace**; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). Let us "...stand fast in **one spirit**, with **one mind striving together** for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). "...Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:13). "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). We must see that we "...love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter 1:22).

Problems will arise, they are inevitable. As a matter of fact, the Lord says they are necessary. Paul told the brethren at Corinth, "*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*" (1 Cor. 11:19). Though God does not cause troubles and controversy, He has always used them to prove or test His people. This was so in the Old Testament. Israel was warned to not follow false prophets that would lead them to worship other gods. "*Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God **proveth you**, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*" (Deut. 13:3; cf. Judges 3:4). It was also true in New Testament days. Jesus said, "*Woe unto the world because of offences! for it **must needs be that offences come**; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh*" (Matt. 18:7; cf. Luke 17:1)!

The best thing to do in respect to problems and controversy among us is to be prepared for them. Don't think that simply because we are at peace now, we will always be at peace. Controversy and dissensions can arise overnight. It is Satan's work to divide and conquer. He can't stand it when people are at peace, especially the Lord's people. Problems come from both outside and inside our ranks. It did so with

the first century church (Acts 15:5; 20:30; 24:5; 28:22). It can and will also be so with us.

Work at peace! *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:3). Abraham exemplified this sentiment in Genesis 13:8. *“And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for **we be brethren.**”* Notice the exhortation of our Lord God through the apostle Paul.

*¹²“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³**Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,** if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. ¹⁴And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. ¹⁵And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful”* (Col. 3:12-15).

This takes work — arduous, strenuous, rigorous, laborious, difficult — hard work! Are YOU willing to expend that much energy to accomplish the will of God? Will YOU do all within your power to see that it's done this side of eternity? Will YOUR hands be clean when they lie folded in death? If there be no peace and harmony with another, make sure it is not on your account. Make sure it is not because you have not done all within your power to bring it about.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem...” (Psa. 122:6). *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (Psa. 133:1).

¹²“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is

Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Two Kinds Of Problems

There are basically two classes or areas of problems among brethren. Each are to be dealt with differently.

1) There are problems that arise that are doctrinal. They are clearly right or wrong, black or white, based on the teaching of the Word of God. Such issues involve: the one church (Eph. 4:4), worship (John 4:24), instrumental music (Gal. 5:19), baptism (Acts 2:38), divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19:9), fellowship (Eph. 5:11), women's role (1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 14:34-35). The list goes on and on.

When men transgress the Law of Christ (Rom. 8:2), their soul is in jeopardy. Unless they repent and obey God, they will be eternally lost in a devil's hell. The Lord's instructions on how we treat error is swift and certain. Paul said, *"To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you"* (Gal. 2:5). We must have *"...no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Eph. 5:11). Many lists of sins shows that those who commit such things will not and can not go to heaven (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

When doctrinal problems exists between brethren and/or congregations, there is no room for compromise. Those involved cannot "agree to disagree." This is not a time to "live and let live" or let "bygones be bygones." The issue(s) involved is not petty differences between brethren. Doctrinal issues are heaven's directive—eternal truth. No man has any right to tread upon such sacred ground. All must accept and

adhere to the Lord's way or be subjects of His just and final wrath.

2) There are problems that arise that are differences of opinion or judgment. They are not doctrinal, they are personal, many times private. They do not involve matters of eternal Truth. The way they are handled is different than if it were a matter of truth and error.

Paul and Barnabas had a strong disagreement over John Mark (Acts 15:36-40). However, they each continued their work of the Lord. Romans 14 discusses problems of personal judgment and how to deal with them. These are different than doctrinal problems.

There are many of these kinds of problems that currently plague our great brotherhood. Brethren have divided, congregations have split and those involved are at a stand-off with one side (sometimes both) refusing to sit down and calmly discuss the matter in a genuine effort to solve it. **Brethren, shame, shame on any who will not meet to discuss their differences and work for peace among brethren.** It appears that such are guilty of the sin of being implacable, unwilling to budge (Rom. 1:31). What a tragedy for it to be left up to God to render judgment in the matter when it is too late for repentance and reconciliation. Brethren, **if you are "at odds" with another, get on their door step NOW. Do all within your power to make things right with them.** If the problem goes unsettled, make sure it's not because of you! Swallow your stubborn pride. Eat your words. Let tears swell up in your eyes and beg forgiveness.

You will face the Lord in judgment. Do you want to do so having made every effort to be reconciled to your brother or do you want to stand before Him having made no effort or having just forgotten it? I'll choose the former.

Matthew 18:15-17 is often misapplied by otherwise well-meaning brethren who seek to make what the Lord said in regards to a private, personal matter and make it apply to a public sin of error and false teaching. Such is a twisting and perversion of the Scriptures [2 Peter 3:16]. If a problem is private, then handle it in that realm. It should only become public when it has not been solved privately. A grave and serious problem arises when brethren misapply the Scriptures and counsel for breaking the Law of God instead of keeping it. [The next chapter in this book by Darrell Beard addresses the correct understanding of Matthew 18:15-17.]

Peace At Any Price?

Some are so enamored and charmed by so-called unity and peace that they are willing to trample upon the Word of God to have it. They are willing to sweep under the rug and ignore every sin to achieve what they think is peace. However, it is not peace with God. They conveniently neglect to understand that peace at any price is not approved of the Lord.

In order for there to be peace, genuine peace with God, we must first have purity, doctrinal purity. James 3:17 says, "*But the wisdom that is from above is **first pure, then peaceable**, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*" Compromising with error is not the way to solve problems. There are many problems that can be "settled among men" when the Truth is ignored. But, they are not settled with God. "Go along to get along" while running roughshod over God's Word is not the theme of the Scriptures.

Peace with God is centered in love and obedience of the Lord's Way. Notice these Scriptures. "*If ye love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). "*Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*"

[John 15:14]. ***²“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. ³For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous”*** (1 John 5:2-3). The love of God is wrapped up in commandment keeping! Not according to our works, but according to God’s works. These are the works that God devised and commands that we obey/work (John 6:29). Without our obedience and performance of the same, there can be no salvation.

Suggestions On Solving Problems

The suggestions listed here concern themselves largely with differences between brethren that are not matters of right and wrong, truth and error. However, the principles involved would apply to all problems whether doctrinal or not.

Have and maintain the right attitude. Humility is a must. When tempers flare and rage, sensible discussion is not possible. Remember to ask yourself, “what would the Lord do?” Would He speak like this? Would He work for a just solution?

Don’t have the attitude it’s “their” problem, let them come to me. Scripture demands that whether we have been offended or are the offender, we move to be reconciled. ***²³“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; ²⁴Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift”*** (Matt. 5:23-24). ***“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother”*** (Matt. 18:15).

Don’t have the attitude you’re going to make them pay. We cannot hold a grudge and be accept-

able to God. We must seek what is best for others [Rom. 15:2; Phil. 2:3].

Don't rub salt in the wound. When brethren recognize their fault and ask forgiveness, don't belittle or shame them. Don't tell them, "it's about time!" Have a heart of compassion and helpfulness. Receive him back in loving arms. See Gal. 6:1-2.

Love all men, especially a brother in the Lord. ⁹*"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. ¹⁰He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. ¹¹But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"* [1 John 2:9-11]. *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"* [1 John 3:15].

Be willing to solve the problem. Acts 6:1-7 shows the brethren were willing to correct the problem. When such prevails, a just solution will be agreeable to all sides.

Be willing to compromise. It won't hurt you to make concessions to help a weaker brother. Romans 14 has much to say about this. However, we cannot compromise on the Truth.

Be willing to swallow pride. *"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted"* [Matt. 23:12]. *"...Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble"* [James 4:6]. *"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time"* [1 Peter 5:6].

Truly consider the other side. Don't think you have done no wrong and the entire problem lies solely with others—it may or may not. Listen to what they have to say, how they feel, what they think. Put yourself in their shoes.

Be willing to admit you are wrong. Be as David and say, *"I have sinned"* [2 Sam. 12:13]. Don't make excuses or seek to shift the blame. Be a man and admit your fault [cf. 1 Cor. 16:13].

Choose level-headed men to discuss the problem. Sometimes it is necessary that others can help. You may need mediators. This was done in Acts 6:1-7. Be impartial. Be willing to abide by just decisions, even if it don't go your way. You can never compromise the truth, but when the Bible truth is not at stake, then abide by fair resolutions.

Do all things in accordance to the Scriptures. This is an absolute, regardless of the problem. God's Word always must govern our lives for it is by it that we will be judged [John 12:48; Rev. 20:12].

Recognize some problems cannot be solved. But, this is only because the other party is unwilling to solve it. You may have gone the "second mile" in attempting to correct it. However, you must never violate the Scriptures yourself in an effort to be at peace with another. You can only do what is good and right. Others have to do the same. Sometimes they do not. When you have done all you can do, realize it's out of your hands. Their blood is not on your head. God knows our heart and their heart. He will take care of the matter at the judgment.

Once the problem is solved, don't keep bringing it up. Some hold a grudge long after a right and just resolution has been reached. If the problem has been worked out, let it die! Put it behind you. To keep bringing it up again and again shows you've either not forgiven or are unwilling for it to be made right. Jesus said, ³*"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. ⁴And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him"* [Luke 17:3-4].

Chapter 16

A Study Of Matthew 18:15-17

Darrell E. Beard

"Love the Brotherhood." What an important and timely theme for this lectureship! I am thankful for the wisdom and insight of those planning this program in selecting such a theme and assigning topics around it. Of all the descriptions of the church, possibly the family analogy comes closest to our hearts. What does it mean to be a Christian? It means that I am a child of God, an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Other faithful Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ.

There should be a closeness among children of God, especially in a local congregation. People today tend to be somewhat detached from one another. They may smile and be friendly, but there is little desire to become close. "Brotherhood" implies intimacy of relationship. We are not mere cordial acquaintances, seeing one another occasionally "at church." We are not merely to respect or admire the brotherhood, but "love the brotherhood." Love for one another should increase as we grow in the faith. *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently"* [1 Peter 1:22].¹

Faithful brethren should be able to be united and work together in spite of differences in personality and judgment. Of course, no one connected with this lectureship would say that this can or should be done by compromising the truth or by being blind to error and sin in another's life. True unity and the ability to

work together is based upon a mutual acceptance of and a striving after *"the faith of the gospel"* (Phil. 1:27). What we mean to say is that faithful brethren should be patient and tolerant with one another in those things that are not matters of faith.

Problems can and do come up among brethren sometimes because of our humanity. Brethren cannot just let another go into sin and error without seeking to win him back. Jonathan Swift wrote,

"And when with grief you see your brother
stray,

Or in a night of error lose his way,
Direct his wandering and restore the day...

Leave to avenging Heaven his stubborn will.
For, O, remember, he's your brother still."²

While the above has some good thoughts, we cannot completely endorse the concept of leaving a stubborn brother's will for heaven to avenge, for heaven's instructions show that a responsibility to lead a sinful brother back to the right way must include certain actions if he remains impenitent. Look at our Scripture from Matthew 18:15-17:

¹⁵"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. ¹⁶But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁷And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

How Our Passage Fits Into Its Context

Toward the latter part of His ministry, Jesus sought to make His disciples more aware of the nature of the kingdom. The burden of Jesus' preaching had been, "*Repent: for the, kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 4:17). The Jews in general were expecting their Messiah to come and sit upon the throne of David in a glorious, earthly kingdom. It was difficult also for the apostles to keep this false view from their expectations and hope. Even after the Lord's resurrection and just before His ascension back to the Father, they asked, "*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel*" (Acts 1:6)?

Several days before the event of our text, Jesus had gone with the disciples to Caesarea Philippi and told them of the coming establishment of the church (Matt. 16:13-19). He had questioned them concerning the different views of people as to His identity. The reply was, "*Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets*" (v.14). He then challenged them as to their own conviction, and Peter responded, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (v.16). He commended Peter, saying that this was the truth as revealed by the Father, and continued, "*...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (v.18). Peter would be given the keys to the kingdom, and what he bound or loosed on earth would have been bound or loosed in heaven (v.19). (The same promise was made to all the apostles in Matthew 18:18.) In Matthew 16:28, Jesus said, "*Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*" (See Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27).

Jesus spoke of the kingdom as "my church," and it would be built upon the fact that He is the Christ,

the Son of the living God. Peter was not the foundation rock upon which the church was to be built. Paul affirmed, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 3:11). Peter himself would later write:

⁶"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. ⁷Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the comer. ⁸And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (1 Peter 2:6-8).

Thus, the church would be divinely built and set upon the sacred foundation of Christ. The church is a relationship of people called out of the world and called together to serve Him. This fact would have a bearing on the teaching of our text.

Six to eight days later, the Lord was transfigured with Moses and Elijah upon a mountain (Matt. 17:1-7). Awe-struck, Peter proposed, *"Let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias"* (v.4). God spoke out of heaven, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him"* (v.5). If Peter had had his way, there would have been three religious establishments built, one to honor Moses and his law, another for Elijah and his preaching, and a third to honor Jesus. The tabernacle for Jesus was evidently not to be any greater than the other two. No, Peter was not going to build three tabernacles. Jesus was going to build His one church. No, the laws and preaching of Moses and Elijah were not going to be honored equally with the

Gospel of Christ. What was going to be preached on earth was that which came from the Father in heaven. This event should have emphasized the difference between human schemes and the divine plan for the church.

Moving on to Capernaum, the disciples asked, "*Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" [Matt. 18:1]. They continued to betray their lack of understanding about the brotherly relationship in the church/kingdom. They thought of the church as a government with some people being raised to positions of prominence and power over others. Jesus taught them that they must be converted and become as little children in order to be great in the kingdom. Fellow members in the kingdom must be loved and protected, It would be most serious for one to offend one of His "little ones." It would be better to be drowned in the depth of the sea (v.6). The concern we should have for a lost brother was illustrated by a shepherd leaving a flock of 100 sheep to seek just one that was lost (v.12). The Father does not want even one of the "little ones" to perish because of one causing him to stumble (v.14).

Rather than being ambitious for positions of power and authority in government, children of God should be concerned for the well-being of their brethren. "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another*" (Rom. 12:10). Rather than trying to gain honor and standing for ourselves, we should prefer that brethren have the honor.

The conversation that follows is our text of Matthew 18:15-17. Before, Jesus had warned against offending the weak. Now, he shows what to do and how to behave when the offense is directed against you. The situation He discusses is put on a basis of a brotherly relationship in the church. As H. Leo Boles observed, "This teaching is prospective, as the church had not been established at this time."³

A Study Of The Text

The situation is introduced by the following words: "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee...*" (v.15a). Who is the brother considered in these words? It is not a brother in the flesh, as in the case of Jude being a brother of James (Jude 1). It is not a brother in the racial sense, as in the case of Paul addressing fellow Jews as "brethren" (Acts 22:1). "The brother is a brother in the faith, a fellow-Christian."⁴ This is a brother in the church (Matt. 18:17). "Brother" implies what had been a close spiritual relationship between the two. There is no pain like the hurt suffered from injury by a loved one. We are prone to become resentful and turn our backs upon the one who has betrayed our love.

Moreover, this brother has "trespassed" against us. The word here is *hamartano*, the ordinary word for sinning. What he has done is not merely to hurt our feelings or to upset us with a thoughtless deed or remark. He has sinned against us. His deed was not merely a strike against us, but something that has now put him in a state of guilt before God. His soul is in jeopardy. If he dies in his present condition, he would be forever lost. The following actions directed by the Lord are motivated more out of the concern we have for a brother's lost condition than for our own hurt feelings. (Note: Some ancient manuscripts omit the phrase "against thee," but it is found in others. The context makes it clear that this is not just sin in general, but a sin against the person who is commanded to act as the text sets forth.)

One must determine that he is the innocent, injured party; 1) that the brother is truly in the wrong, 2) that what he did constitutes a sin which places his soul in jeopardy, 3) that he shares no guilt in the brother's sin, 4) that he did not contribute to it in some way, 5) and that he has done no sin in responding to the trespass.

This passage has frequently been used against sound brethren who publicly refute false doctrine being taught publicly by a brother in error. The sound brother is told that he must not publicly answer false doctrine and name the teacher thereof until he has gone to the false teacher privately and talked to him about it. This is a very convenient doctrine for the devil, who can silence sound teachers while permitting false teachers to publicly promote their agenda by means of lectureships, articles, tapes, books, etc.

The offended brother has a responsibility to undertake a process which will lead to one, two, three, or four steps.

STEP 1 is found in the following instruction: *"...go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother"* (v.15b). Don't wait for him to come to you. Don't talk to others about the evil he has done you. Don't cultivate hatred and resentment against the brother and refuse to speak to him. Go to him. McGarvey advised, "Go at a time, and select a place, and seek for other surroundings, which are most favorable to success in your effort."⁵

Tell (show in ASV) him his fault. The Greek text says, "Go and reprove him." Vincent describes the word *elegdzon* as "to test, try, search out, to cross-examine with a view to convincing or refuting, to rebuke or chide."⁶ The Law of Moses had given this instruction: *"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him"* [Lev. 19:17]. Speak clearly, but calmly and gently. In a similar situation, Christians were told, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* [Gal. 6:1]. The Phillips translation is glaringly wrong in this place: "Go and have it out with him!" Remember your

objective in going to a transgressing brother. It is not to humiliate him, get him told, or to pressure an apology from him. The purpose is to lead him to recognize his sin, repent of it, and be restored so that brotherly fellowship can be renewed.

If he hearkens to you, you have gained a brother. More often than not, the offending brother will respond to such reasonable and loving measures. He may not have realized the wrong he did. He may have been trying to find a way to make things right. He may have tried to justify himself. If the brother does repent and make things right with the offended party and with the Lord, the matter should go no further. However, if the first step fails, the process must continue with:

STEP 2. *"But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established"* [v.16]. The situation now becomes a little more public, but there still is an effort to keep it as private as possible. Sometimes it is hard for one to see his own faults. He may want to blame the other person. Pride may cause him to defend himself and refuse to admit sin. The one sinned against may be tempted to give up and wash his hands of the erring brother. He should not do it. He should go back a second time, taking one or two others with him. The Old Testament taught that claims can be settled based on the testimony of two or three witnesses. *"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established"* [Deut. 19:15].

Who should be taken as witnesses? Select them carefully for their sincerity, impartiality, and acceptance by both sides. Why take others on the second visit? The additional person or persons add weight to the situation. The offender is likely to see things in a different light and give greater consideration to his

conduct. "The calm impartiality of outsiders may settle the dispute."⁷ The extra witness or witnesses can gather information and confirm some facts which may need to be shared with others. Hopefully, the problem can be solved at this point, so that it need go no further after repentance and prayer for forgiveness among the persons in attendance. However, if this is not the case, then...

STEP 3 must be taken: *"And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church..."* [v.17a]. The word "neglect" here means to refuse. His heart is becoming harder, his pride stronger, and his conscience more seared. It must now be made public knowledge to the church. How is it to be told to the church? In the case of a congregation with elders, surely they must be told and the matter left to their best judgment as to how to handle the situation. If a congregation does not have elders, possibly a meeting of the responsible men should be called and the two or three witnesses tell the story.

The church should make effort to discuss the situation with the erring brother, urging repentance. Surely the added encouragement and serious entreaty of the congregation as a whole will bring one who has an ounce of conscience to make things right. In the process, the words of James 5:19-20 will be followed: *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."* If the brother is converted, then he should be forgiven and welcomed back into fellowship as Paul said of the brother in Corinth who had been disciplined: *"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. ⁷So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. ⁸Wherefore I beseech you*

that ye would confirm your love toward him" (2. Cor. 2:6-8).

The three steps taken thus far may fail to meet their objective. If so, the last, sad...

STEP 4 must be taken: *"...but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican"* (v.17b). The NKJV says, *"But if he refuses even to hear the church...."* He turns a deaf ear even to the entire, united efforts of the brethren in the church to bring him back to spiritual soundness!

Nothing remains now but for the severing of the fraternal ties of Christian fellowship. The first and second admonition have been given (Titus 3:10). He continues to walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6). Now, he must be taken away from the congregation (1 Cor. 5:2) and turned over to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5). He must be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17). The church must withdraw themselves from this brother (2 Thess. 3:6). They are to have no company with him (2 Thess. 3:14). Hopefully, such action will result in the eventual salvation of the one so disciplined (1 Cor. 5:5).

He is to be regarded now as a heathen (Gentile) and a publican (tax-collector). These terms are symbolic of an outsider and an outcast from God's people. The one who will not hear the church has no claim on it for its fellowship and blessings any more than anyone else out of the church.⁸ The Pulpit Commentary said, "Christ assumes the exercise of Church discipline ... Finally, if all these processes fail, we must cease to regard the offender as a Christian brother ... Yet we should never hate the offender, but always desire to restore him — as we should desire to convert 'the Gentile and the publican'."⁹

Principles Involved In Our Text:

Number 1. In cases of sin in the church, brethren should be seeking one another out. In Matthew 5:23-

24, Jesus showed that the person guilty of an offense against a brother should go to him and be reconciled with him. Ideally, the offender and the one offended should meet one another as they are going to the other's house. Both should possess an earnest desire for reconciliation.

Number 2. As mentioned before, our text does not forbid one from responding publicly to error being taught in a public manner by another. Our text involves the responsibility of one regarding a brother who has sinned against him personally. The steps to be taken in seeking reconciliation are to be taken within a local congregation. Error can deceive precious souls from the truth of God's word and jeopardize their eternal well-being. Such destructive teaching must be checked immediately before it has a chance to do more harm.

Number 3. An important principle can be gleaned from our text. In all cases of difficulties, differences, and problems that arise between brethren, they need to take the initiative and settle the matter between themselves. The least public and least painful approaches should be used. Evidently, something like this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote, "*I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord*" (Phil. 4:2).

Number 4. There is a general failure in the brotherhood to practice the four steps of our text. It is difficult to go to an offending brother and face him with his sin. It's much easier to talk about him to others. It is hard to go back a second time when our sincere efforts at reconciliation have been rejected. It is easier to say, "Well, I tried, but it didn't work out. I will just wash my hands of him. If he wants to make things right, he'll have to come to me next time." It is unpleasant to turn the matter over to the church. One could say, "I don't want to cause a lot of confusion in the congregation. I'll just keep quiet about it." The church might talk to the person, but not follow up on

it because of family and friends of the offending brother.

Number 5. Disfellowship means little when fellowship among brethren has not been that close and loving anyway. The removal of fellowship may not make much of an impression upon one if there was not much fellowship in the first place. He doesn't feel like he has lost something precious — something he cannot live without. This should cause congregations and individuals to work on developing the kind of love and fellowship that ought to exist among brethren.

Number 6. One thing ought to be kept in mind: such action as involved in our text of Matthew 18:15-17 is done for the main purpose of rescuing a brother from the eternal consequences of his sin.

Conclusion

True Christian love does not ignore sin and error in the brotherhood. It does not pretend that all is well when it is not. One who has enough care and concern to turn an erring brother back to faithfulness exhibits the greatest love. May we have enough love to do the hard thing in difficult times.

⁹"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. ¹⁰And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (1 Thess. 4:9-10).

ENDNOTES

¹Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

²From the poem "The Swan Tripe Club in Dublin" as quoted in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*,

Frank S. Mead, editor, [Westwood, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Company], p. 40.

³H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* [Nashville, Tennessee; The Gospel Advocate Company, 1958], p. 375.

⁴*The Pulpit Commentary: Matthew* Vol. 2; H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, Editors, [New York; Funk & Wagnalls Company], p. 212.

⁵J. W. McGarvey, *New Testament Commentary: Vol. I — Matthew and Mark* [Delight, Arkansas; Gospel Light Publishing Company], p. 158-159.

⁶M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, [McDill AFB, Florida, MacDonald Publishing Company], Vol. 1, p. 63.

⁷The Pulpit Commentary: Matthew, Vol. 2, p. 226.

⁸Boles, p. 377.

⁹The Pulpit Commentary: Matthew, Vol. 2, p. 226.

Chapter 17

Seeking The Kingdom

Matthew 6:33

Steven Jagers

Most of us have many “irons in the fire.” We are involved in, and are sometimes overwhelmed with, so many things [i.e., business, job, home, community, church, school]. Do we have *too* many irons in the fire? Do we have so many irons in the fire that we really are neglecting all of them? What will we let go?

Problems like these can be solved by prioritizing. Jesus emphasized priorities. He says, “*But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*” [Matt. 6:33]. What does Jesus say should be our number one priority in life? What does Jesus say we must seek first? We must “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” The aim of this chapter is to teach us how to do just that!

In order to seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness we must answer three basic questions: 1) What exactly is this kingdom and righteousness that we are to seek first (It’s hard to seek them if we don’t know what we’re supposed to be seeking!)? 2) How do we seek first the kingdom and righteousness? 3) Why do we sometimes fail to seek first the kingdom and righteousness?

What Is The Kingdom And Righteousness We Are To Seek First?

Fortunately for us, Jesus had much to say about the kingdom and righteousness, so identifying the

kingdom and righteousness is rather easy. In the Sermon on the Mount alone, Jesus talked about the kingdom nine times and righteousness five times. Since Jesus commands us to seek first — to be completely absorbed in, to persevere after with strenuous effort — the kingdom and righteousness, it is imperative for us to discover what are the kingdom and righteousness.

The Kingdom. So many people today do not understand what the kingdom is, just like many people in the days of old. Many people incorrectly think that at the end of time Jesus is going to come back to earth and set up a physical kingdom. The truth is, the kingdom is the church, which has been around since the first century. In promising to build His church, Jesus refers to the church and kingdom interchangeably (Matt. 16:18-19, "*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock [on Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, in verse 16, sj] I will build **my church**, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹And I will give you the keys of the **kingdom** of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*"). In Matthew 16:18-19, in promising to build His church, Jesus refers to the church and the kingdom as the *same institution*. Jesus promises to build His church and give Peter the keys to get into that kingdom. What are those keys? We will find out later when we answer our second question: How do we seek first the kingdom and righteousness?

The apostle Paul refers to the church and the kingdom interchangeably in Colossians 1:13,18; and also, in that same text, he states that the kingdom was already in existence, because he and the Colossian Christians were in it — nearly 2000 years ago. ¹³*"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the **kingdom** of the Son of His love ...* ¹⁸*And He is the head of the body, the **church**,*

who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

The kingdom on earth is the church, made up of people who do God's will here on earth as it is in heaven. Listen as Jesus tells his disciples how to pray before the coming of the kingdom — the church — in Matthew 6:10, *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Those, who are in the kingdom on earth—the church—continue to faithfully do the Father's will in order to remain in the kingdom and thus enter into the kingdom's final, eternal state in heaven at Jesus' second coming. Matthew 7:21-23,

²¹"Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.

²²Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? ²³And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, from you who practice lawlessness."

The kingdom is the church, made up of people who do God's will on earth as it is in heaven. It has been in existence since the first century and will enter its eternal state of existence in heaven at Jesus' second coming.

Righteousness. Now that we have discovered what the kingdom is which we are to seek first in our lives, let's discover what the righteousness is, which we are also to seek first in our lives.

The word righteousness means being made right by God, by doing right—working righteousness. Acts 10:34-35, *"Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵But in every nation whoever fears Him and works*

righteousness is accepted by Him." Where do we find this righteousness we must work—do—in order to be acceptable to God? This righteousness does not come by keeping the Old Law—the Old Testament. Romans 3:21, *"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets."* What "law" is it by which none of us can be justified—made right—in God's sight? It is the "law" just quoted in verses 10-20. What "law" is quoted in these verses? It is the "law" containing the books of Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah quoted in that text. Which "law" contains these books? The law of Moses — the Old Testament! Though many people try to live by this old law or a combination of the Old and New Testaments, they cannot be justified — made right — with God by so doing. If righteousness is not found in God's old law, where, then, is the righteousness found which we must do in order to be right with God?

The righteousness which justifies—saves—is found in the New Testament—in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:16-17, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* If we believe the Gospel which reveals how to be saved and righteous, we will "work righteousness" [Acts 10:34-35] — we will obey what the Gospel commands. Romans 10:16, *"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report?"* The righteousness we must seek first is the righteousness that comes by obeying the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why seek first the righteousness of God? Why obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ? We seek first the righteousness of God—we obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ—in order to be saved. Romans 1:16, *"...I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the*

power of God to salvation...!" The righteousness which we must seek first is the righteousness—the salvation—that comes by obeying the law of righteousness—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, do you see any connection between the kingdom and righteousness which Jesus commands us to seek first? The kingdom of God and His righteousness go together. They are inseparably linked. They are tied together with a knot that cannot be undone. Paul even says the kingdom is righteousness. Romans 14:17, *"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

What is the connection between the kingdom—the church—and righteousness? God's kingdom is the church, made up of the people who are made righteous—right with God and thus saved by doing the works of righteousness—the commands of God—revealed by God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now that we know what are God's kingdom and His righteousness that we are to seek first, we are now ready to ask our next question:

How Do We Seek First The Kingdom And Righteousness?

In order to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, in general, we must possess both the **right attitude** and **right action**.

Right attitude. We must possess the right attitude in order to be in the kingdom and righteous. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:3). *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled"* (Matt. 5:6).

Right action. Along with the right attitude, we must have the right action in order to become a citizen of the kingdom and in order to remain in the kingdom and enter its final, eternal, glorified state in

heaven when Jesus returns to judge the world. *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* [Matt. 6:10].

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven [the eternal phase, SJ], but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day [the day of judgment, SJ], Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? 23 then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" [Matt. 7:21-23].

In general, in order to be right with God — saved and thus in His kingdom — His church, we must have the right attitude and right action.

Now, let's be more specific. In particular, to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, there must be: **initial obedience** and **continual obedience**.

Initial obedience. This is obedience to the Gospel of Christ in order for one to initially become right with God through Jesus Christ, and thus become members of the church-citizens of the kingdom. This initial obedience involves being born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom. John 3:5, *"Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."*

How are we born of water and the Spirit? We are baptized in water by one Spirit into the one body which is the one church—the kingdom. 1 Cor. 12:13, *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."* The one body is the one church/kingdom

[Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; Matt. 16:18-19]. How exactly are we baptized by the one Spirit into the one body — the church, the kingdom — and made to drink of the one Spirit? We are baptized as the Spirit reveals in the Gospel and then the power of the Spirit [who raised Jesus from the dead, Rom. 1:4], raises us up from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life to live as the Spirit directs in His revealed word, the law of righteousness. Romans 6:4,17-18,

⁴“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ... ¹⁷But God be thanked, that though you were slaves to sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

Romans 8:1-2, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has in made me free from in the law of sin and death.”*

Is not this exactly what people did in Acts 2 in order to be righteous—right with and saved by God—and thus citizens of His kingdom—His church? Yes!

¹⁴“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my voice. ¹⁵For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was spoken by the prophet

Joel: ¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of my Spirit... ²²Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know — ²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it... ³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. ³⁷Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? ³⁸Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... ⁴¹Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ... ⁴⁷And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" [Acts 2:14-17, 22-24,36-38,41,47].

How do we **initially** seek first God's kingdom — His church — and His righteousness? We initially obey the law of the kingdom — the law of righteousness — the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in order to enter the kingdom. We initially obey the Gospel by being born of water and of the Spirit — by being water baptized as the Spirit directs in His revealed word, the Gospel. We initially seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness by doing what the people in Acts 2 did

— they obeyed the Gospel, the word which was given to Peter and the rest of the apostles by the Spirit. Just as the people did in Acts 2, we must:

1. **Hear the Gospel** of Jesus Christ, which reveals God's plan for making us righteous in His Son, Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-36; Rom. 10:16-17);

2. **Believe that Gospel** (Acts 2:37; John 20:30-31; if we believe it we will obey it — Acts 2:37; Rom. 10:16; James 2:19,24,26; Heb. 11:4,7,8,29,30);

3. **Confess our faith** in Jesus to be the Christ (Acts 2:37; Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10; Acts 8:36-38);

4. **Repent of** — turn away from — our sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19);

5. **Be baptized** — immersed in water (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Peter 3:20-21), in order to be righteous — right with and saved by God — and thus citizens of His kingdom—members of the one saved church (Acts 2:38,41,47)!

Then, of course, after initial obedience, we must remain as loyal citizens of God's kingdom—His church—by continuing to be righteous — continuing to obey God's law of righteousness, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the law of the kingdom! Seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness includes continual obedience.

Continual obedience. This continual obedience could be summed up with the three "p's" — proclaim, practice, and protect.

1. *Proclaim.* After our initial obedience to the Gospel in order to enter the kingdom, we continue to seek first the kingdom and righteousness by proclaiming the kingdom and its law — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, we tell others how they can be righteous — right with and saved by God — and thus citizens of God's kingdom like ourselves. *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come"* (Matt. 24:14). *"And He said to them, Go into*

all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jews first and also for the Greeks. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith"* (Rom. 1:16-17).

2. *Practice.* Furthermore, after entering the kingdom by our initial obedience to the law of the kingdom, we must not only proclaim the kingdom and its message, but also continue to practice or live by the kingdom's law. Clearly, we will not be very effective in proclaiming the kingdom and its law to others if we are not obeying the law of the kingdom ourselves! Remember the kingdom is made up of people who are doing the Father's will on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Furthermore, recall how the citizens of God's kingdom — His church — must continue to do the Father's will in order to remain in the kingdom and thus enter into its final, eternal, glorified state in heaven (Matt. 7:21-23). Therefore, even though we are children of God — citizens of God's kingdom — Christians, we can fall away and be eternally lost IF we do not continue to obey — practice — the law of the kingdom!

In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus describes the kingdom on earth as a field filled with both wheat and tares and how the tares are unfaithful citizens of the kingdom who will be cast out into the furnace of fire — hell — when He returns (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). In the parable of the dragnet, Jesus states the kingdom on earth is like a dragnet with both good and bad fish and explains that the bad fish will be cast into the furnace of fire in the end (Matt. 13:47-50). In the New Testament, Christians — citizens of the kingdom — are continually encouraged and warned to remain faithful (1 Cor. 10:12; 15:1-2; Gal.

6:9; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Heb. 2:1-3; 3:7-10; 6:4-6; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Rev. 2:10). Why all these words of encouragement and warning if it is impossible for a Christian to eternally fall away?! To seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, we must practice what we preach.

3. *Protect.* In order to continue to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, we must protect the kingdom and its law of righteousness.

A. We protect the kingdom and its righteous law by commanding all the citizens of the kingdom themselves not to preach nor practice any other message but the pure, unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ.

¹⁸"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book, ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18-19).

⁸"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8-9). Why such strong and damning warnings not to add to nor take away from the Gospel? ¹¹"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12).

B. We protect the kingdom and its righteous law by disciplining all citizens of the kingdom who sin by

failing to preach and practice the pure, unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ¹⁸And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-17).

⁹"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹But now I have written you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor. 5:9-11).

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thess. 3:6). "And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thess. 3:14-15). This noting and marking erring brethren demands that we name them (i.e., Hymenaeus and Alexander, 1 Tim. 1:19-20; Hymena-

eus and Philetus, 2 Tim. 2:16-18; Demas, 2 Tim. 4:20).

C. We protect the kingdom and its righteous law by warning our fellow citizens about false teachers and their doctrine. By informing our fellow citizens of false teachers and their doctrines, they will know not to listen to such men and their doctrines which damn the soul. *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them"* [Rom. 16:17].

⁹"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11).

How do we **continue** to seek first God's kingdom — His church and His righteousness? We continually obey the law of the kingdom — the law of righteousness — the Gospel of Jesus Christ by proclaiming, practicing and protecting it.

Now we know not only *what* the kingdom and righteousness are, but also know how to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. Why don't we always do so?

Why Do We Sometimes Fail To Seek First The Kingdom And Righteousness?

There are two major reasons *why* we fail to seek first the kingdom and righteousness: the *love of money and material things* — the cares and pleasures of this world.

The love of money and material things. We sometimes fail to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness due to our love of money and material things. Jesus realizes that the love of money is one reason why we sometimes fail to seek first His Father's kingdom and righteousness. That is why Jesus tells us [in the same context where He commands us to seek first the kingdom and righteous] not to love or serve money — mammon.

19"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in YOU is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" [Matt. 6:19-24].

One reason we sometimes fail to seek first the kingdom and righteousness is the love of money. We become too busy seeking money and material things to truly seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.

We can see all around us how the love of money and material things keeps many church members from seeking first the kingdom and righteousness. Some brethren deliberately forsake the assemblies to work on weekends in order to get paid overtime — not because they need the money to provide for personal

or family *needs*, but because they want to spend it on more of their material wants. Other brethren put little in the collection plate on Sunday because they are spending most of their money on their material possessions — not on their needs, but on their wants. Also, we have even seen preachers who will compromise the gospel, the law of God's kingdom and God's plan of righteousness, in order to keep their jobs and the money rolling in.

Why do we sometimes fail to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness? The love of money and material things become first in our lives!

Well, why do you suppose the love of money and material things tempts us not to seek first the kingdom and righteousness in our lives? Instead of Jesus, money may appear to offer more solutions to the cares and pleasures we have in this world.

The cares and pleasures of this world. We sometimes fail to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness in our lives due to the cares and pleasures of this world. It is difficult to keep the kingdom and righteousness first in your life when the cares of this world seem so overwhelming. Money, at times, seems to be more of the answer to fulfill those pleasures and to ease those cares, than Jesus. Again, Jesus realizes how the pleasures and cares of this world can keep us from seeking first the kingdom and righteousness. That is why Jesus tells us, again in the same context where He commands us to seek first the kingdom and righteousness, not to worry about the things of this world.

²⁵“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father

feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? ³²For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matt. 6:25-32).

It is certainly hard to keep God's kingdom and His righteousness first in our lives, especially when the enticing pleasures of this world are all around us and when the cares of this world seem so overwhelming, and money, at times, seems more able to fulfill these pleasures and ease these cares, than putting God's kingdom and His righteousness first. Yet, Jesus tells us to seek first His Father's kingdom and His righteousness, and He'll take care of the rest! Listen again to Jesus' reassurance in Matthew 6:33: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."*

Why do we sometimes fail to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness as Jesus commands? The love of money and material things and the pleasures and cares of this world take up our time.

Now, how can we know if the love of money and material things and the pleasures and cares of this world are threatening our efforts to seek first the kingdom and righteousness? Worry! In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus mentions the word "worry" or "worrying"

five times (vs.25,27,28,31,34). My beloved brethren, if we are worrying about money and material things and the pleasures and cares of this life, can we really seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness? No! How can we, if we are spending so much time and energy worrying about money and material things and the pleasures and cares of this world? If you are worrying about money and the pleasures and cares of this world, let this be a warning sign to you! Have faith! Seek first the kingdom and righteousness, and God will take care of all your needs — not all your wants and desires, but all your needs!

Conclusion

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus commands us to seek first the kingdom and righteousness. In order to seek first the kingdom and righteousness as Jesus commands, we must answer — and have answered — three basic questions: 1) What exactly is the kingdom and righteousness which we are to seek first? 2) How do we seek first the kingdom and righteousness? 3) Why do we, sometimes, fail to seek first the kingdom and righteousness?

1) *What exactly is the kingdom and righteousness which we are to seek first?* The kingdom is the church, made up of people who do God's will on earth as it is in heaven, which has been in existence since the first century and will enter its eternal state of existence in heaven at Jesus' second coming. Righteousness is the righteousness — the salvation — that comes by obeying the law of righteousness — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, there is a clear connection between God's kingdom and righteousness. God's kingdom is the church, made up of people, who are made righteous — right with God and thus saved, by doing the works of righteousness — the commands of God — revealed by God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2) *How do we seek first the kingdom and righteousness?* In general, we must possess both the right attitude and right action. In particular, there must be initial obedience and continual obedience. We must initially obey the law of the kingdom—the law of righteousness—the Gospel of Jesus Christ by **hearing** the gospel, **believing** it, **confessing** our faith in Christ, **repenting** of our sins, and being **baptized** — immersed — in water, in order to be saved and thus enter the kingdom—the church. Then, we must continue to obey the law of the kingdom—the Gospel—by preaching, practicing, and protecting it in order to remain in the kingdom and thus enter its eternal state in heaven at Jesus' second coming.

[3] *Why do we sometimes fail to seek first the kingdom and righteousness?* The two major reasons why we sometimes fail to seek first the kingdom and righteousness are: the love of money (material things) and the cares and pleasures of this world. How can we know if these worldly things are keeping us from seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness? By worry! If we are spending all our time worrying about making more money, getting more material things, or about the cares and pleasures of this world, we are NOT seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness!

May God help us to seek first His kingdom—the church of Christ— and His righteousness—the Gospel of Christ!

Chapter 18

Paul And Barnabas

Acts 15:35-40

Dean Buchanon

³⁵“Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. ³⁶And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, [and see] how they do. ³⁷And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. ³⁸But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. ³⁹And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; ⁴⁰And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God” [Acts 15:35-40].

One of the great evidences of the inspiration of the Bible is the humanity of the characters found therein—even the heroes. Therefore, it is not surprising that we read of this disagreement between Paul and Barnabas—a very sharp disagreement that has been argued and debated down through the ages, especially when the subject of unity is up for discussion. Both of these men were Gospel preachers, brothers in Christ, co-workers, lovers of God and Jesus Christ, sufferers for His cause, traveling com-

panions and defenders of the faith and, they were human. It is only natural for people who work together for very long, to disagree about various things, which surely means that Paul and Barnabas had other disagreements than this one which is recorded.

Since the apostle Paul wrote about half the New Testament he gives us many insights into his own mind and character. We know less about Barnabas since we have none of his writings and he does not occupy a place of importance compared to that of Paul. However, we do have enough information about both men to enable us to explore the relationship between these two disciples of Christ who were so prominent in the spread of Christianity in the very beginning. In fact, if we had only the book of Acts, Luke gives us sufficient information there to get a pretty good picture of the character and personalities of these two men.

We first encounter Barnabas as a Christian in the early days of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:32-36). The apostles, Peter and John, had been arrested for preaching Christ to the rulers of the Jews who called them into question concerning the healing of the lame man at a gate of the temple. They were finally released after being threatened not to teach nor speak in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18).

When they returned to the disciples, they recounted what had happened to them and all the church prayed and praised God. The disciples were "of one heart and one soul" at that time and as a result, they all shared the things they had in common. Barnabas was one of those early Christians, and participated in sharing of material things that none would be in need. He sold some land he had and brought the money to the apostles that it might be used to help others. These few verses give us quite an insight into the character and attitude of Barnabas.

His other name was Joses. He was obviously well known to the apostles for they had given him the

name of Barnabas. He was a Jew of the tribe of Levi whose home was the island of Cyprus.

Based on his actions as described in this passage, **Barnabas was a man of compassion** (he was concerned about those in need); **a generous man** (he gave money to those in need); **a man of action** (not having sufficient cash on hand he sold his land to get the money); **a talented man** (the apostles knew him out of thousands of Christians); **a man with the ability to influence others** (the name Barnabas, given by the apostles meant "son of comfort or exhortation)."

The next time we find Barnabas mentioned by Luke, he is defending Saul of Tarsus upon his arrival in the city of Jerusalem after he had been converted by Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:26-29). Saul had led the effort by the Jews to have all Christians imprisoned or killed and was on his way to Damascus for that purpose when Christ appeared to him which resulted in Saul's conversion.

Some time elapsed and Saul had come to Jerusalem where he attempted to join the disciples there (Acts 9:27). The disciples were afraid of him, which is understandable since he had been the arch enemy of the church in Jerusalem and had been responsible for much suffering on the part of Christians there. So, Barnabas spoke up on Saul's behalf, describing how Christ had spoken to Saul, sent him to Damascus where he was baptized and Saul had, in fact, been boldly preaching Christ in that city.

There are further revelations about Barnabas in this passage. **He did not hold one's past against that person** (he spoke in defense of Saul). The persecution of the church by Saul was no doubt well known among all Christians, especially in Jerusalem where they would never forget his consenting to the death of Stephen which evidently began his laying waste the church (Acts 8:1). **He was willing to speak up when the issue of truth and a person's**

faith was at stake. Much wrong has been done in the church because people were not willing to speak up. Reputations have been ruined, careers have been destroyed, and families and congregations have suffered because everyone kept silent. Barnabas was not the kind to keep silent when something needed to be said. **He recommended Paul's preaching.** By defending the apostle to the disciples, Barnabas enabled Paul to preach Christ in the city where he had caused so much damage to the church when he was there last (Acts 9). It's easy to forget, that if it were not for lesser known people, great and talented people would never become known. The benevolence, kindness, generosity, and self confidence of Barnabas is demonstrated in his defense of Saul on this occasion. There was no jealousy in the heart of this man of God. How great it is when brethren will speak up for one another and refuse to be threatened by another who may be more talented.

As the Gospel of Christ spread by the preaching of those who were scattered from the Jerusalem persecution, a large congregation was planted in Antioch of Syria. When the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to that city to help the new church (Acts 11:20-24). It is here that we gain further insight into the character of Barnabas, for **Luke describes him as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.** As a result of Barnabas coming to Antioch and preaching, "much people were added to the church." As a result, it wasn't long until the work had grown to the point that help was needed, so Barnabas left for Tarsus to find Saul to come and help in the work at Antioch (Acts 11:26). For a year they worked together and taught many people in that city and the church grew rapidly.

Identified as one of a group of "certain prophets and teachers" which were in the church in Antioch, Barnabas and Saul were selected by the Holy Spirit to spread the message of salvation to the Gentiles (Acts

13:20). Thus, we have the beginning of the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul on which he was accompanied by Barnabas and John Mark, who left the group at Perga and returned to Jerusalem.

During this trip, Paul and Barnabas encountered opposition from the Jews and Luke says that they “waxed bold” in their speaking of the word to these Jews. They were persecuted in the cities where they preached and in Lystra, the people attempted to make them “gods,” calling Paul, Mercury and Barnabas, Jupiter.

On this trip, another insight into the character of Barnabas is provided us, for it was during this time that the writer of Acts began to refer to them as “Paul and Barnabas,” rather than as “Barnabas and Paul.” This indicates that Barnabas was allowing Paul to move to the front and become the chief speaker as he is recognized by the people in Lystra (Acts 14:12). In mentioning individuals in a group, the most important are always mentioned first in order as Luke began to do with these two.

Returning from their lengthy mission trip, Paul and Barnabas preached and taught in Antioch for a long time after they gave their report to the church there (Acts 14:28). Then some men came from Judaea and began teaching false doctrine which Paul and Barnabas and others in Antioch confronted. This resulted in the two, plus others from the church there being sent to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and the church in that city concerning the matter of whether or not Gentiles had to be circumcised to become a Christian (Acts 15).

Once the matter had been settled, they returned to Antioch and again taught and preached the word (Acts 15:35). This brings us to the problem that arose between our two ambassadors for Christ. After agreeing they would revisit all the churches they had established, a disagreement arose because Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them and Paul said

no, because Mark had left them in the middle of the first journey. There is no doubt why Paul did not want to take John Mark. It was because the young man had deserted them in the work of spreading the Gospel. Exactly why Mark returned to Jerusalem on that fateful trip, we do not know, but whatever the reason, Paul did not think it acceptable and blamed Mark for deserting them. The contention became so sharp that the two men parted company, Paul taking Silas with him and Barnabas taking Mark with him.

While we know much more about Paul than we do Barnabas, it is important to our study to look at some of the things we know about this great apostle.

For example, we know that **Paul had a struggle within** for he describes it in the Roman letter ([Rom. 7:14]. We know **he was dedicated to that which he believed** (Acts 9; 23:1). We know **he endured great affliction** as he describes it in detail in his letter to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 11:21-33). We know **he knew he was saved** as he wrote to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:6). We know **his doubts were not about Christ** (2 Tim. 4:6-8). We know **he had courage**, otherwise he would have given up after being persecuted for preaching Christ. We know **Paul believed in unity** because he rebuked Christians for their division in the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10). We know **he confronted false teachers** as he himself wrote to the Galatian churches (Gal. 1).

Now, based upon these things, we know about these two men as revealed in the Bible, they have much in common as people. Both men were human (this may sound simplistic but it is important we remember that all people, even the great men of the Bible are human). Both men had their strengths and their weaknesses. Both men had their own personality. Each man came from his own particular background. Both men gave their all to live and spread the Gospel of Christ. Both men were faithful servants of God. Both men loved the lost. Both men refused to

allow false religion to influence them. Both men respected the church and her leadership. Both men made mistakes.

The disagreement was over a matter of opinion which, without a doubt, grew out of the background and personality of both men. Barnabas was of the opinion they should take John Mark with them and Paul was of the opinion they should leave him behind. The contention was allowed to become so sharp the men went their separate ways.

Some have thought John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas because of what Paul said to the Colossians. *“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him)”* [Col. 4:10].

If that be the case, and Barnabas was defending Mark for no other reason than his blood relationship, then he was wrong as he was prone to think Paul was wrong. All we have in regard to the matter are the words of Luke who tells us that Paul and Barnabas split up after a sharp disagreement over whether or not John Mark should go with them on their second missionary trip.

With these things before us, some observations are in order. **First, even after the disagreement, the two men continued preaching and teaching Christ.** We should never allow another person to so influence us by their words and actions that we quit serving the Lord. Remember, our faith is in Christ. This is a good illustration of the faith of Barnabas and Paul. They kept on serving the Lord. Whether or not we remain faithful to Christ must never be determined by other people, geographical locations, circumstances or anything external to ourselves.

Second, neither Paul nor Barnabas was a false teacher. The disagreement was not over doctrine, it was a matter of opinion. False teachers and false doctrine must be confronted and exposed.

The ridiculous idea some have that a congregation should tolerate false teaching and false teachers for the sake of unity is nothing more than cowardice and a lack of faith in the Bible as the inspired word of God. Christ and the apostles warned continuously about false teachers, who, as described by our Lord are "wolves in sheep's clothing."

Third,, strife among brethren is not good. The argument has been made that the strife between Paul and Barnabas was a good thing because they went their separate ways on this occasion and instead of one missionary effort, there were two. This is an appeal to the old idea that the end justifies the means. It is never right to do wrong to do right. Stated another way, it's never right to sin in order to preach the Gospel. If this argument was true, then the only logical thing to do would be to cause division in all congregations and we would have missionaries flying all over the world! Such is absurd.

It is true that God uses things that happen, to his good, but that does not mean that he wants it that way. He used Pharaoh, an evil king, to punish and save his people Israel. God used the pagan nations of Canaan on more than one occasion to work out his eternal will and purpose. That does not mean he prefers it that way. God knows what men will freely choose to do, whether they choose to do good or to do evil. Our Father did not harden Pharaoh's heart by arbitrarily selecting him and making him evil. That is the way the king was and God simply used it. God does not want anyone to be lost, on the contrary, he wants all to be saved [2 Peter 3:9].

Fourth, the original apostles had their disagreements. During the personal ministry of our Lord, the disciples often disagreed and even resented each other, to say nothing of the fact they disagreed with Christ himself.

³⁵“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. ³⁶And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? ³⁷They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. ³⁸But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? ³⁹And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: ⁴⁰But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. ⁴¹And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John” [Mark 10:35-41].

Notice that two of the apostles tried to gain favor with Christ and the others were “much displeased” with them. When the twelve returned from the town where they had been sent by Christ to get food, and found him talking to a Samaritan woman they marvelled at his actions (John 4:27). Even though the disciples did not speak their thoughts to the Lord on this occasion, there were times when they would question his teaching.

All of this simply reminds us that the main people of the Bible were human beings with all the frailties and weaknesses of human beings. They were not perfect. Therefore, we should not find it surprising that there are disagreements in the brotherhood in our time. It will be true as long as there are people involved with people. Paul and Barnabas were subject

to the same emotions, feelings and character flaws that we are.

Fifth, it is not a matter of whether or not there will be disagreements among brethren—there will be. Most important is what we disagree about and how we handle the differences we may have. One of the pleas of the restoration movement was to "...speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Therefore, we must disagree with any brother who teaches something contrary to the Bible. But what about those things which are matters of opinion which is evidently the category into which we would have to place the problem between Paul and Barnabas. These are the areas we must be concerned about.

Sixth, attitude is always important—especially when people disagree with one another. Our attitudes should be formed by the teachings of Christ. Treating others as we would like them to treat us, turning the other cheek, loving our enemies, having compassion, and a host of other teachings of our Lord, when applied daily in our lives will help us a long way toward having the right attitude, even when our patience is tried and our feelings be hurt. That is not to say we reach perfection in always having the right attitude about a given matter, not even the apostles could do that which is demonstrated by the contention between Paul and Barnabas.

The most important thing is to develop an overall attitude in harmony with that of our Saviour and when we do allow our emotions to get the best of us, our dominant attitude will bring us back to reality. This is demonstrated by the apostle regarding his falling out with Barnabas and his attitude toward John Mark at that time. There are some passages which confirm this. He mentions Barnabas in a good light in his letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 9:6). And, near the end of his life, he speaks very highly of Mark when he asks Timothy to bring him when he comes to visit Paul, even saying that Mark was

“profitable to him [Paul] for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Remember, the first time we encountered Barnabas, he had sold his land to help the needy (4:36-37). The first time we encounter Paul, he is Saul of Tarsus and is watching and consenting to the murder of Stephen by the Jews (Acts 7:58). These facts give us a good idea of the temperament of the two men. Barnabas is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, who had compassion on the needy and was willing to go anywhere for Christ. He had become a Christian very near the beginning of the church, perhaps even among the three thousand that were baptized on Pentecost (Acts 2:41).

Paul, on the other hand, was the scourge of Christianity from the beginning. He described himself as, “...a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee” which he described as “...the most straitest sect of the Jews” (Acts 23:6; 26:5). He was in the process of doing everything he could in opposition to Christ (Phil. 3:6,7). Christians were being put to death and imprisoned by this man. The fact he was a Pharisee reveals something about his personality and temperament. They were the sect that was constantly confronting Christ regarding his teaching, trying to entrap him at every turn. They are severely chastised by Christ according to the Gospel account (Matt. 23). Over and over again he called them hypocrites.

Barnabas was a very mild-mannered man. Paul was a very severe kind of a man. It is only natural that these two different kinds of personalities would clash sooner or later. It is also only natural that the conflict would come over matters of opinion rather than matters of faith because both men were totally committed to Christ and his Gospel. This was what enabled them to be so successful on their first missionary journey when they had to confront every imaginable obstacle in almost every city. It was what enabled them to continue that journey, even after

Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem, for they surely had words about it when the incident occurred, given the sharp contention months later.

People are different, and that difference will determine a measure of success that could not be attained any other way as long as all pursue the same goal within the same framework of honesty, integrity and respect for one another in order that regardless of their differences of opinion, they remain faithful and committed to that goal.

It is ironic that people of completely different temperament and personality are drawn together and become best of friends and co-workers. Sometimes this is simply a social friendship and sometimes it is because both are attracted to a common cause or business endeavor. It is certainly true of Christianity for people of all kinds of personalities become Christians.

For example, consider the apostles. John, we remember as the apostle of love, the one who was gentle and kind and one of the apostles mentioned as being closest to Christ. Judas, on the other hand, was the one furthest away from Christ and ultimately, the one who would betray him. Then there was Peter, who was the impetuous one—the one who was always opening his mouth and putting his foot in it. Some were fishermen, one was a tax collector and "one born out of season" who was a scholar.

The fact that our Lord selected such a diverse group of men as the apostles to take his message to the world, should tell us that differences in people can be used as an asset rather than allowed to be a hindrance. Consider a football team for example. There are eleven different positions which are played by eleven men with different skills and abilities. No coach in his right mind would recruit eleven quarterbacks and ignore the other ten positions. Every coach knows he must have men who excel at each of these

positions, then he builds them into a team with a common goal—win the championship.

Players have different personalities. Some are laid back, some are aggressive, some like to practice, some are humorous, some are serious and it is the job of the coach to see that all these bundles of talents, attitudes, skills and differences elevate the goal above their own preferences.

Christ and his church use all kinds of people as we have already shown, because people respond to the Gospel and to life in different ways. Jude wrote. *"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. ²²And of some have compassion, making a difference; ²³And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"* [Jude 21-23]. Jude understood that people are different. Some need to be approached with great compassion and others need to be shocked into obeying the truth. Some obey the truth upon hearing it the first time, while some wait years before they are ready to accept the truth and submit to baptism in order to be saved.

Preachers present the Gospel in different ways. Some use charts and visual aids extensively. One Gospel preacher said the rumor was out among his preaching brethren in his area that he could not perform a wedding or preach a funeral without a black board. Other preachers almost never use such visual aids. There are some people who much prefer a lesson using visual aids while others prefer no visual aids.

The church is no different than families (even good families). It is very common to see a family with the children (to use an old cliché) as different as "daylight and dark." One child will be outgoing, never meeting a stranger, always talking and laughing—while a brother or sister is rather shy and withdrawn. How many of those of us who are preachers have had

the experience of preaching a sermon and having people in the congregation respond to it in different ways? To one it may be "the best sermon they have heard" while to others it is mediocre at best.

Did not the apostles have similar experiences? Look at the result of Paul's preaching in Athens and his preaching in Corinth and Ephesus. Athens was perhaps his least successful effort at telling the world about Christ, yet even in Athens there were some who accepted the word and believed on Christ (Acts 17:34). At Ephesus he had great success and many became Christians. In fact, Paul preached longer in Ephesus than he did in any other city, yet not all who heard him there believed.

The Bible teaches us to "*love the brotherhood*" (1 Peter 2:17). The brotherhood is made up of people which means there are all kinds of diverse personalities, backgrounds and cultures—we are to love them all. That doesn't mean we have to agree with them all in reference to all things. Even those from whom we must withdraw fellowship must still be the object of our love and compassion rather than an enemy (2 Thess. 3:14,15).

There have been situations where two brothers would fall out with each other over a matter that had nothing to do with false doctrine, but rather a personality clash or a trivial incident and they would go to their grave still mad at each other and not speaking to one another—still holding a grudge. There have been congregations split because of disagreements over things of no biblical significance, but simply because members (including preachers and elders) could not have their way. On occasion, there have been brethren who have been out with each other for a period of time, settle the matter and forgive one another. There have been congregations split as just described, and within a few years they have resolved their differences and settled the matter.

Evidently that is what Paul and Barnabas did regarding their differences over John Mark. That is what all Christians should do. When Christians argue, bicker, fuss and fight, not only does it hurt the church, it discourages young Christians and repels people who have not yet been saved.

There are no superstars in Christianity for, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). Satan rejoices when brethren bite and devour one another rather than “loving the brotherhood.”

Chapter 19

Epaphroditus Philippians 2:25-27

Virgil L. Hale

The theme of the Lectureship this year is concerning a subject that is so badly needed in the church today. There is not enough love among brethren, and we are commanded to *"love the brotherhood"* (1 Peter 2:17). This is not merely a good suggestion, it is a command. In fact, it is in the same verse that we are told to *"fear God."* Is fearing God important? Is it just a suggestion? Can we serve and please God without fearing (having the proper reverence and respect) for Him? Most assuredly not! Jesus said, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."*³⁵ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another"* (John 13:34-35). When Jesus said, *"...as I have loved you,"* He meant to the same extent. How much did He love us? Enough to give his very life! Do we have that kind of love for our brethren? That kind of love is a command, it can be seen, and it will benefit all who are recipients of it, as well as the one who demonstrates such love. Love is one debt that we can never get paid. Paul wrote, *"Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law"* (Rom. 13:8).

We must stand firmly for the truth regardless of what comes to us in life, but in our presentation and defense of the truth, let us remember that we are to do so in love. Paul wrote, *"But speaking the truth in love..."* (Eph. 4:15). Our attitude, whether dealing

with the world or with our own brethren is extremely important. If we are not careful, we get more involved in personalities than we do in truth—in doctrine. This is a shame, but nevertheless there is much evidence to support this charge. We read, "*Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*" (Rom. 13:10). If love will cause us not to work ill to our neighbor, surely love will keep us from working ill to our brother. However, regardless of our concern for and proper attitude and manner in opposing error, and upholding truth, there will always be someone who will impugn our motives and accuse us of being unkind and unloving. Let us be sure that this is a false accusation and not based on fact. We as Christians have a responsibility to other Christians. If the church is to grow and prosper, we must be concerned about one another. If we all loved one another as much as we love ourselves, things would be much different in congregations and in the church as a whole. There are times when we, intentionally or unintentionally, cause damage to one another both orally and in writing. We can become spiritual cannibals if we are not careful. Paul warned, "*But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*" (Gal. 5:15). This is not to say that we are not to stand for truth and right, because this is absolutely necessary. We are to "*...mark them that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them*" (Rom. 16:17). We are "*...to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*" (Eph. 5:11). This means that we are not to have any part with error, but we must go a step further—we must speak out against it. However, let us never leave the impression that we thoroughly enjoy condemning our brethren, and that we are happy to have something to condemn. In our speaking and in our writing we must show love and not hate. We must speak the truth, but we must

speaking the truth in love [Eph. 4:15]. There have been times when I have heard brethren refer to other brethren as "fools," "idiots," "ignoramuses," etc. I have heard such expressions, and I have seen the same in articles. In the first place, such should never be uttered or written, and in the second place, such language will turn people off, and they will not give any attention to the truth that might be taught. We should be saddened, not happy, that brethren have left the truth. Our attitude should be that expressed by Paul when he by the Spirit wrote, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* [Gal. 6:1]. James wrote, *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; ²⁰Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins"* [James 5:19-20]. Our desire must be to save souls from death—not push them further into error. I am convinced that if people know we love them and are deeply concerned about their spiritual welfare, we can talk straight to them and they will be much more likely to listen. As someone has well said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Paul *"...ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears"* [Acts 20:31]. Surely these people knew Paul loved them dearly and was deeply concerned about their soul. Let us show this kind of concern to the lost in the world, but also to our brethren who have strayed from the fold. Our aim must be to win the lost to Christ, not to win an argument nor to "nail people to the wall."

The Lord has given us a great task. We are to take the Gospel to "all nations" (Matt. 28:19), to "every creature" (Mark 16:15). "...repentance and remission of sins" is to be "preached" in the name of Christ "among all nations" [Luke 24:47]. We read, *"To the intent that now unto the principalities and*

powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, ¹¹*According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Eph. 3:10-11). The Lord has given His church a big responsibility, but in the first century, without all of the means of communication and transportation we have today, “the gospel” was “preached to every creature which is under heaven...” [Col. 3:23]. They took the Great Commission seriously. Do we? Even when the church was scattered because of persecution, “...*they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4). What a great lesson for us—they went, they went everywhere, they went everywhere preaching, they went everywhere preaching the word. If we emulate them in our lives today, we can make a great impact on our world. As one little boy said to the other, “Boy ain’t we got the truth.” The other answered, “Yeah, and ain’t we keeping it to ourself.” The sad thing is, we are so busy trying to overcome the many errors that creep into the Lord’s church, our time is used up in these efforts (as needed as they are) and we have little or no time to spend in reaching the alien with the Gospel of Christ. Also, we get so involved in the affairs of life that we often say, when approached about doing our part for the Lord, “I just don’t have time.” Do we not “make time” for those things that we really want to do? Do we not find time to read the paper, watch TV and countless other things we really want to do? We have a great God, a great Christ, a great Gospel, we are members of the greatest institution in the world (the Lord’s church), and we have been given a great task. Do we really believe that people are lost without the Gospel? If we do, what are we doing about it? As the saying goes, “**Everybody** thought that **somebody** would do it, but **nobody** did it.”

The church is compared to the physical body in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12. In the physical

body, each member has its own function, and when each member does its part, the body will function as God intended for it to. When all of us (in the church) do our part, the body of Christ (His church) can grow and prosper. Every member has his own particular talents. I do not read of "non-talented" members in the Lord's church. The more we do, the more we will be able to do. Our Lord said, "*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit*" (John 15:2). The song asks the question: "Are you sowing the seed of the kingdom brother?" As in the physical realm, if there is no sowing, there can be no reaping! Do we really mean it when we sing, "I will work, I will pray, I will labor every day in the vineyard of the Lord?" Do we really realize that "*the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few*" (Matt. 9:37)? Are we praying "*...the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest*" (Matt. 9:38)? Let us pray as though everything depends on the Lord and work as though everything depends on us.

There are lessons to be learned by observing the lives of other people. In fact, we are influencing other people, and we are being influenced by them. From birth to the grave the preceding is true. Even new babies have an influence in a household. If you don't believe it, just ask someone who has been blessed with the privilege of bringing a new born home. From the day they arrive, they make an impact on the rest of the family. Your nights and your days are drastically changed. This is not said as a complaint, but is simply stated as fact. We are not always aware we are influencing other people, nor are we always aware we are being influenced, but such is the case, nevertheless.

In this lesson we are going to be looking at a man that is not widely known. In fact, he is mentioned very few times in the Bible. However, we can gain

some important lessons from his life that will be of great benefit to each of us. The book of Philippians is the only book in the New Testament that mentions Epaphroditus. His name appears in this book only two times. Not much is said about him, but we can learn much by carefully examining what is said. In fact, if we emulate the life of this man, the church will grow and prosper. About this, there can be no doubt.

First of all, it is evident that **Epaphroditus was a member of the church at Philippi**. His name means comely, handsome, charming. I do not know, nor do you, that his physical qualities measured up to his name, but we are concerned much more about his spiritual qualities. I do not know what our Lord looked like, and really do not care. I do know that Isaiah the prophet said of Christ, *"...he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him"* [Isa. 53:2]. There was nothing about Christ physically that would attract people to him. In fact, if that were the only attraction, they would be no better off anyway. It is sad that in the Lord's church today far too many congregations try to use physical things—physical attractions—to draw people. Jesus said, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"* [John 12:32]. If Christ's love and sacrifice does not draw people unto Him, any substitute that we offer is in vain.

Epaphroditus was sent, by the Philippian congregation to bring funds to Paul who was in prison. This proves he was trustworthy and also that he was not ashamed to be counted as a friend of Paul [a prisoner]. In our text, Paul is sending him back home to the brethren at Philippi. Earlier, Paul had said he hoped to send Timotheus unto them shortly, and even hoped that he [Paul] would be able to visit with them before long. He said it was necessary for him to send Epaphroditus, and he gives his reasons for doing so.

However, before getting into the reasons, let us notice some of the things Paul said about Epaphroditus. Each of these is highly complimentary.

First of all, **Paul refers to him as "my brother."** There are people who live their lives in such a way that we are ashamed to let people know they are members of the Lord's church. Here was a man Paul was proud to claim as "my brother." There are a lot of titles that are worn in the name of religion, none of which are authorized by the Word of God. In fact, titles are expressly condemned. However, if I can live in such a way before the world and my fellow Christians that my brethren will be proud to refer to me as a "brother in Christ" that will be sufficient. What greater blessing could one ever enjoy than being a part of the family of God?

What a privilege—what a blessing—and what a responsibility it is to be in God's family! Who could possibly be of more importance to us than our brothers and sisters in Christ? I have heard Christians say they felt closer to their spiritual family than to their physical family. After all, God's children have more in common with each other than they do with their own family who are not Christians. In the text, Paul did not refer to Epaphroditus as just a worker, but as "a companion in labour." They were fellow workers in the same cause, the cause of the Lord. What a great blessing it must have been to be able to work with the great apostle Paul.

Outside of Christ, there is no one that I admire more than I do Paul. At one time he did everything he could against the cause of the Lord, but when he learned the truth and obeyed it, he changed from Saul the persecutor, to Paul the persecuted. Rather than complaining about what it cost him to serve the Lord, Paul was happy and thankful to be able to suffer for the One who had given His life for him. Do you and I have that kind of attitude today?

Paul also referred to **Epaphroditus as a “fellow-soldier.”** This means Epaphroditus was on the battle line for the Lord and was willing to suffer the same kind of hardships and dangers as did Paul. I feel quite sure there were many who did not want to be associated in any way with Paul. In fact, some were ashamed of his bonds, however it was said of Onesiphorus, *“...for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain”* (2 Tim. 1:16). I am convinced this was the attitude of Epaphroditus.

Paul also referred to **Epaphroditus as their “messenger”** and as one who **“ministered”** to his (Paul’s) needs. The word “messenger” is from the same word from which we get the word apostle. He was sent from the church at Philippi, therefore he was their apostle (their representative) to Paul.

It is evident that Epaphroditus loved the brethren at Philippi and they loved him. They had heard he was sick, and it is possible they could have been blaming themselves for having sent him on this mission. He was anxious for them to know about his recovery. Evidently, his illness had lasted for some time, because word had gotten back to them, and I am sure they were anxious about his condition. This would be a normal reaction on their part. When you are separated from a loved one who is sick, it is more difficult than if you were there with them.

Concerning his healing, some might ask why Paul did not miraculously heal him. We know that Paul had the power of the Holy Spirit and was able to do such. However, it is very evident from the Scripture that miracles were not performed just for the benefit of those who had some kind of malady. They were for a specific purpose and that was to help produce faith and to confirm the Word. Evidently such was not needed here and thus no miracle was performed. Also, it is evident that miracles were fast coming to an end as God’s written Word was nearing its completion. This, by the way, was not the only time Paul did

not heal someone miraculously. He left Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20) and he did not heal Timothy of a stomach ailment (1 Tim. 5:23).

Paul was unselfish in sending Epaphroditus back home. Even though he was of much help to Paul, he was more concerned about the well being of Epaphroditus and peace of mind for the brethren at Philippi. Remember now, here was a man who had been "sick nigh unto death." Paul said that *"God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."* His sending Epaphroditus back would ease their mind "when ye see him again ye may rejoice" and Paul went on to say, "and that I may be the less sorrowful."

Let no one think for a moment that Epaphroditus was shirking his responsibilities by returning home. In fact, Paul told the brethren at Philippi to *"Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation."* That is, they were to give him the proper honor due him for what he had done. Would this have been the case had he shirked his responsibilities? Certainly not! It is evident that Epaphroditus had done his job well, because Paul had everything he needed because of what Epaphroditus had brought (Phil. 4:18).

There are a number of lessons we can learn from Epaphroditus and what is said about him in this text. First of all, **we must be willing to be used in the service of the Lord and our fellow man.** Doing the work of the Lord is more important than life itself. How many of us really feel that way? Here was a man who endangered his life to serve the Lord. The King James version reads, *"Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me"* (Phi. 2:30). The American Standard Version reads, *"...hazarding his life...."* How many times has your life or my life been in danger because we dared to serve the Lord? It is said of Paul and Barnabas, *"It seemed good unto*

us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" [Acts 15:25-26]. Paul wrote in Hebrews 12:4, "ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." I know I have never lost a drop of blood because I am a Christian, and I dare say that you haven't either! Paul had the same kind of attitude as did Epaphroditus. He could say,

"And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that befall me there: ²³Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. ²⁴But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more" [Acts 20:22-25].

Again we read, "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" [Acts 21:13]. Are we committed to the Lord and His cause this deeply? I am afraid that far too many of us are "fair weather Christians." Our service is often one of "convenience" rather than "conviction"—"conversion." Such an attitude will not take us to heaven. Let us strive to emulate Paul and Epaphroditus as we live on this earth. Here were two men who were busily engaged in the work of the Lord.

I am convinced that if we stayed busier, we would have little if any time to cause trouble in the church of our Lord. As the old saying goes, "A mule cannot

kick while he is pulling a load." In other words, one cannot kick and work at the same time. Truly, "Idleness is the devil's workshop." Not only are we to work, we are to work together. The word "fellowship" means joint participation. Are we jointly participating in the Lord's work? Paul wrote, *"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain"* (2 Cor. 6:1). Again he wrote, *"For we are labourers together with God...."* (1 Cor. 3:9). From these verses we learn we are to labor, we are to labor together, and we are to labor together with God. There are many people who labor, who even labor together, but they do not have God as their partner. If God is not our partner, our labor is in vain. However, our *"labour is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:58). *"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love..."* (Heb. 6:10).

For a number of years, we have had problems in the Lord's church. As stated earlier, we spend most of our time dealing with these problems, and very little time reaching the lost with the Gospel. To use some words of Jesus, *"...these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone"* (Matt. 23:23). We definitely have a responsibility to uphold and defend the truth, but the Lord has given us the responsibility of carrying the Gospel to the world. The Great Commission was given to the Lord's church, and as a part of that church, you and I have responsibility to do what we can to reach the lost.

Epaphroditus learned a lesson that you and I need so badly to learn. **He learned that serving the Lord and his brethren was extremely important.** He, like Paul, was willing to put his life in danger to serve the Lord. After all, Jesus promised, *"He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"* (Matt. 10:39). Do we really believe this promise of our Lord? Do we live as though we believe it? Are we willing to put our life on the line to serve the Lord? Are we willing to help support those

who are willing to do so? As a matter of fact, it can take more faith and courage to live for the Lord than it does to die for him. Some might say, "I will gladly give my life for the Lord." We might make such a statement. This is a great attitude, but are we willing to live our life for the Lord? This is what really counts. This is what really means something. This is really what the Lord wants of us. This requires, not a one time sacrifice, but continual sacrifice. Paul wrote the brethren at Rome, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*"² *And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*" [Rom. 12:1-2]. What does God want? He wants "a living sacrifice" not a dead sacrifice, as was the case under the law of Moses. This is not unreasonable service that God is demanding it is "reasonable service."

After what God and Christ have done for us, is it unreasonable that we be asked to give ourselves in service to them? Where does such service begin? It begins with our thinking. If we are to be conformed to the Lord's will and not the world, we must do so by "renewing" our "mind." We cannot live right unless we think right. No chain is stronger than its weakest link, and no man is stronger than his weakest think. We are told, "*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*" [Prov. 23:7]. We may not be what we think we are, but rest assured—we are what we think! What we say and what we do comes from the heart. Jesus said, "*But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man.*"¹⁹ *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*" [Matt. 15:18-19]. We are indeed products of our thinking.

I hope our thinking has been aroused by this study and that we will have a greater desire to be servants of the Lord and of our fellow man. When we serve our fellow man, we are in reality rendering service unto the Lord. Jesus said, "...*Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*" [Matt. 25:40]. On the other hand, He also said, "*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me*" [Matt. 25:45]. Which will we hear at that day?

Let us give careful and serious consideration to this, because our very soul is at stake. Where we are in the hereafter is depending upon what we do in the here and now. Are you a faithful servant of the Lord? If not, make the corrections that need to be made that all might be well with your soul at the day of judgment.

Chapter 20

Restoring The Wayward

Galatians 6:1

Charles W. Leonard

The wayward is one of the most neglected groups in the church. This group may be neglected out of sure neglect, unconcern, carelessness or because it is a most critical and difficult group with which to work. To restore something means to bring it back to a former state or condition. The wayward are no longer in a saved state and must be restored to a relationship which they once had. Restoration is a continuing work because about fifty percent of those we teach and reach become unfaithful within a period of seven years. Restoration of the wayward is one of the most neglected works of the church.

It Is Possible For God's People To Become Wayward And Lost

Christians become wayward when they turn away from Christ and live in disobedience. Judas, one of the twelve apostles (was numbered with them and took part in their ministry) fell because of transgression. *"For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry" (Acts 1:17). "That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place" (Acts 1:25).* Paul, who was an apostle and preacher, was aware of the fact that it was possible for him to fall away as well. *"But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others,*

I myself should be a castaway" [1 Cor. 9:27]. One of Paul's fellow workers by the name of Demas forsook Paul because of his love for the world. *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia"* [2 Tim. 4:10].

When Paul met with the elders of Ephesus at Miletus, he warned them of future apostasy in Acts 20:29-30, *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* Later, when the apostle John wrote to the church at Ephesus, Christ had something against the church there and indicated they had fallen. Revelation 2:4-5, *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. ⁵Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."*

When Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, he spoke of those who had fallen from grace because they were seeking justification under the law. Galatians 5:4, *"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."* Christians are repeatedly warned against becoming wayward or falling from God's grace. *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God"* [Heb. 3:12]. *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall"* [1 Cor. 10:12]. From all of these examples and Scriptures, it must be apparent to all serious Bible students that a Christian can become wayward and need restoration.

Different Figures Are Used To Describe The Wayward

The wayward are described as those who are overtaken and in need of restoration. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”* [Gal. 6:1]. To be overtaken is like one runner in a race being overtaken by another. The wayward have not been diligent enough and have been overtaken by Satan. Wayward Christians are those who have erred from the truth. *“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him”* [James 5:19]. To err from the truth is to be deceived, seduced, roam or wander from the truth.

God’s people that have become wayward are described as being sick and in need of a physician. *“...They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* [Mark 2:17]. Wayward Christians are involved in the practice of sin and have become spiritually sick, it is described as spiritual death. *“But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth”* [1 Tim. 5:6]. Sin has a way of separating both saint and sinner from God. *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear”* [Isaiah 59:2]. The writer of Hebrews describes those who fall away as reaching a point of no return.

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, ⁵And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, ⁶If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify

to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6).

Those who become wayward are described as treading upon Christ and dishonoring the blood of the cross in Hebrews 10:29, *"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"* It is possible for Christians to ultimately become the enemies of Christ. ¹⁸*"[For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things]"* (Phil. 3:18-19).

It is possible for wayward Christians to become spiritually destitute according to John in Revelation 3:17, *"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."* Christians who are spiritually destitute and wayward are in worse condition than before they obeyed the Gospel according to 2 Peter 2:20-22,

²⁰*"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. ²¹For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. ²²But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is*

turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

Things Do Influence Children Of God To Go Back Into Sin

Sickness and trials that come to Christians may cause them to become wayward. God has not hedged his people about. Sickness and trials come to God's people as well as to others. Christians who miss services due to illness often become unfaithful and fall away. Many of God's blessings are enjoyed by the evil and the good according to Matthew 5:45, "*That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*"

All of God's people who live righteous lives can expect persecution to come their way. "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (2 Tim. 3:12). God permits the trying of our faith because it works patience. "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience*" (James 1:2-3). The crown of life is promised only to those who successfully endure temptations. "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*" (James 1:12).

It is not uncommon for Christians to become wayward because of offenses. Instead of following Bible teaching and confronting the one who has offended them, they simply quit the church. "*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother*" (Matt. 18:15). When they become wayward because of

offenses, the problem is compounded because they have rejected Bible teaching regarding the way to correct problems and teaching regarding faithfulness. Some claim to be offended because of too many hypocrites in the church, while they are involved in hypocrisy themselves. It may well be that the offense may be at the word of God. *"Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended"* [Matt. 13.21].

Some Christians become wayward because they don't find what they want in the church. They may call around to find the congregation that will do the most for them and their family. Many Christians want to only be on the receiving end. To them it is more blessed to receive than give. Paul taught the opposite of that in Acts 20:35, *"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."* Christ taught that the road to greatness is through serving, rather than being served in Matthew 23:11, *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."* All Christians should be looking for opportunities to serve instead of wanting to be served.

There is also the possibility that many become wayward because they were never really converted. The denominational concept of Christianity has influenced many to join the church contrary to plain Bible teaching. *"Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"* [Acts 2:47]. Genuine conversion is necessary in order to enter the kingdom or church according to Matthew 18:3, *"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Paul taught that one is not saved from sin until he has obeyed from

the heart that form of doctrine. *“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. ¹⁸Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness”* (Rom. 6:17-18). The Jews on the day of Pentecost were told what to do and why they were doing it in Acts 2:38, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* Those who do not know what they are doing and why they are doing it to become a Christian, end up simply “joining” the church.

Evil association has influenced many Christians to become wayward. Peer pressure is often more than some Christians can handle and remain faithful. The New Testament warns us against evil association. *“Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”* (1 Cor. 15:33). *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness”* (2 Cor. 6:14)? We read of those who refused to confess Christ because of pressure from others in John 12:42-43, *“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: ⁴³For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”*

The attractions of the world has led many children of God to become wayward. When people are in love with the world, the love of the Father is not in them according to 1 John 2:15, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”* One of Paul’s co-workers forsook him because of his love for the world. *“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia,*

Titus unto Dalmatia" (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul exhorted the Romans not to be conformed to the world in Romans 12:2, *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."* Friendship with the world will, in time, make one the enemy of God. *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4). We have no way of knowing the number of Christians that have become wayward because of their attraction and love for the world.

Neglect is one of the easiest and most common ways for God's people to become wayward. There is no escape if we neglect the great salvation offered to us in the Bible. *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him"* (Heb. 2:3). To know to do good and not do it is sin according to James 4:17, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*

All Christians Have A Responsibility To Restore The Wayward

Many Christians have been led to believe that it is the elders and preachers responsibility to restore the wayward. While it is true that elders and preachers share in this responsibility, it is a responsibility that should be shared by every servant of Christ. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* (Gal. 6:1). All Christians are brethren and should be spiritual, therefore, the command applies to all. Christians are special and have a special responsibil-

ity to one another according to Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* Christian love for one another is to be sincere, intense or fervent according to 1 Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."* When Christians love one another as taught in the scriptures, they will put themselves out to care for the physical and spiritual needs of one another. Genuine love will move one to do everything within his power to restore a brother or sister in Christ, which is loving in deed and in truth. *"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"* [1 John 3:18]. When we fail in our duty to our brethren, we sin against them and also sin against Christ. *"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ"* [1 Cor. 8:12].

Christianity Should Be Practiced When Restoring The Wayward

Before one can be effective in restoring the wayward, he needs to consider or examine himself. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"* [Gal. 6:1]. *"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates"* [2 Cor. 13:5]?

We should remember that all of us are tempted and subject to sin as we seek to restore the wayward. A superior attitude can be counter productive in the restoration process. John plainly teaches that all Christians sin in 1 John 1:8, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in*

us." To teach otherwise makes God a liar. *"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"* (1 John 1:10). We should demonstrate a spirit of humility and show compassion toward those in sin. Our care and concern should be demonstrated in all of our efforts to restore the wayward. The practice of the golden rule should permeate all of our efforts. *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets"* (Matt. 7:12).

Conclusion

Souls of the wayward are not about to be lost, they are lost. Restoration of the wayward is a neglected and important work. Souls are saved through this work; souls of the wayward and souls of the faithful. James describes what happens when the wayward are restored in James 5:20, *"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."*

Chapter 21

Covering Sin

James 5:19-20

Ben F. Vick, Jr.

The theme for this year's lectureship, "*Love the Brotherhood*," is as vital and necessary today as it was when the Holy Spirit directed Peter's pen to write this imperative in the first century. My subject, "Covering Sin," deals with one way in which we can show love for the brotherhood.

"Love" is demonstrative. Paul wrote,

⁸"...for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. ⁹For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁰Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10).

A description of love in action is seen in 1 Corinthians 13. The Holy Spirit by the pen of Paul said, "*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another*" (Gal. 5:13).

One may give without loving, but one cannot love without giving (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8). A father may say he loves his children, but if he does not provide for them, he does not love them. Like faith, love must be demonstrated by action. A dead love, like a dead

faith, is worthless. Thus, if we love a brother in Christ who has gone astray, we will make every effort to bring him back. This is one way to demonstrate our love for the brotherhood.

The text for my lesson is James 5:19-20 which reads: *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; ²⁰Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."* Let us study it together.

God's Children

Four times in this general epistle James refers to his readers as "brethren" [4:11; 5:7,9,19]; eight times he calls them "my brethren" [1:2; 2:1,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12]; and three times he affectionately calls them "my beloved brethren" [1:16,19; 2:5].

In the Bible, the term "brethren" may refer to sons of a father and mother or of either [Gen. 42:13]; or the word may be applied to neighbors or kinsmen closely bonded together [Gen. 13:8; 19:7]; or it could be used to refer to those who have made a profession of the same faith and religion [Acts 6:3]. "Brethren" in the book of James refers to the church, the spiritual twelve tribes of Israel [James 1:1; Matt. 19:28; Gal. 6:16].

To be called a brother in Christ should be satisfactory to any Christian. But some brethren desire that others use high sounding titles in addressing them. This is a violation of the Lord's sentiments expressed in Matthew 23:8-12.

⁸"But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. ⁹And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. ¹⁰Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. ¹¹But he

that is greatest among you shall be your servant.¹² And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted."

N. B. Hardeman said:

And now it has come about that you are discourteous unto any preacher if you just address him as, for instance, "Brother Srygley." The world wants to say "Dr. Srygley," "Reverend Srygley," and even "Parson Srygley." Now, their objective is to do the man a favor and an honor, but in so doing they go beyond anything in the Bible. I have had people call me "Dr. Hardeman." I am not a doctor. I am not "Reverend Hardeman." That word is found only once in all the Bible, Psalm 111, verse 9. "Holy and reverend is thy name." God's name is reverend. N. B. Hardeman's is not. Some folks call me "Elder Hardeman." I am not an elder, neither in years nor in any official way. I am not a pastor. "Well," someone says, "what are you?" I am just N. B. Hardeman, and if I can manage to live so that my brethren can conscientiously extend their hand and call me "Brother Hardeman," I want no greater title. *(Hardeman Tabernacle Sermons, Vol. III, p. 55.)*

"Any Among You" Could Be Me

After addressing his readers as "Brethren," James writes, *"if any of you do err from the truth...."* The mood of the verb is subjunctive and expresses that which is not really taking place, but which probably will take place in the future. It is a supposed or probable future case. It is possible for any member of

the body of Christ to err from the truth. "An old debater once said that James 5:19-20 was the strongest passage in the New Testament on the possibility of apostasy." [Roberts, J. W., *A Commentary on the General Epistle of James*, p. 227].

Many deny the possibility of apostasy. In his commentary on James, brother Guy N. Woods, quoted Sam Morris, a Baptist, who wrote a tract entitled, "*Do A Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?*" Morris wrote:

We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul.... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger.... The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his Soul. [*A Commentary on The Epistle of James*, pp.311-312].

Brother Joseph Cox of Louisville, Kentucky, told me of a Baptist preacher named Calvin Gregory who believed the same as did Sam Morris. Brother W. L. Totty had several debates with Gregory. Cox said that there was a husband who walked in on his wife who was committing adultery with another man. The husband took a double-barreled shotgun and administered "instant justice." Gregory was called upon to

preach the man's funeral; some in the area questioned as to whether Gregory would back off of Morris' position on the impossibility of apostasy. But he did not.

Several years ago an inquirer asked Billy Graham if he believed that a person who receives Christ and then leads a "wild" life would go to heaven. Graham answered, "It is true that once a person has been truly saved, in the full meaning of that term, there is nothing that can deny him the fruits of that salvation."

The Bible plainly teaches that one can so fall from the truth as to be eternally lost. Every Biblical warning is an implication of the possibility of one's departure from the faith (Heb. 3:7-4:1; 1 Cor. 10:1-13; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 11:21-22; Heb. 6:4-6).

Every example is a reminder to us that we, too, can turn away from the truth. Judas by transgression fell (Acts 1:24-25). Demas turned away from Paul and the cause he served (2 Tim. 4:10). Hymenaeus and Alexander made shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim. 1:18-20). Hymenaeus and Philetus erred from the truth (2 Tim. 2:16-18). Even Paul realized that he, having preached to others, could be lost (1 Cor. 9:27). Preachers, take warning!

To err from the truth means to go astray from the truth, to wander (Matt. 18:12). This is done through carelessness, a failure to watch or give attention to the soul's welfare (1 Peter 5:8). Or this departure may come because one is not grounded in the faith as he ought to be and one is led away by some working of error (2 Peter 1:5-9; 3:18; Heb. 5:12-6:1).

The means or *modus operandi* by which one leaves the truth may vary. The "horse upon which one rides out of town" may be some false doctrine. Or it may be that one leaves the truth by means of one or more of the works of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21.

The Solid Rock Of Truth

Pilate asked the question, *"What is truth"* (John 18:38)? Whether the question was asked sincerely or sarcastically, the Bible answers his question. Truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Jesus referred to himself as the truth (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). The truth will make one free (John 8:32). Some fail to use the truth properly (Rom. 1:14-25). The Christian soldier is to be girded with truth (Eph. 6:14). We are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We sometimes become the enemies of some by speaking the truth (Gal. 4:16). We shall be damned if we do not believe the truth; we shall be saved if we obey it (2 Thess. 2:10-13). Some will not walk according to the truth (1 Tim. 6:5). Others resist the truth (2 Tim. 3:8). Some will turn their ears from it (2 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14). We purify our souls in obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22). We can discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6). We need to be fellowhelpers to the truth (3 John 8). The word of God is truth (John 8:32).

Conversion

The word "convert" means "to turn around" or "to cause to return, to bring back." Jesus said of the people of his day, *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them"* (Matt. 13:15). The apostle Peter said to those gathered at Solomon's porch, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19). The American Standard Version of 1901

reads, *"Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"* [Acts 3:19]. Several months ago I heard a sister in Christ speaking of someone's having been converted; then, she corrected herself and said, "I mean baptized." I told her that to be converted includes baptism. As proof of this, compare Acts 3:19 with Acts 2:38. See the chart below.

Acts 3:19, Repent and be converted = sins blotted out
Acts 2:38, Repent and be baptized = remission of sins

Baptism is the act of converting. In baptism we put off the old man and put on the new man [Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 3:9,10].

The word "convert" is also applied to a follower of Christ who returns to the world. Before Peter denied the Lord three times he was warned. *"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: ³²But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren"* [Luke 22:31-32]. Peter did deny the Lord three times, but he turned around [John 21:15-17]. He is still strengthening his brethren through the inspired epistles that he wrote (1 & 2 Peter).

The passage under consideration in this lesson uses "convert" and "converteth" in reference to the restoration of an erring child of God. There are many of the Lord's flock who have wandered from the fold of safety. If all those who were baptized into Christ had remained faithful to the Lord, our meetinghouses would be too small.

The Blessings Of Bringing The Erring Back To God

A child of God who errs from the truth is called a sinner. He who sins shall die spiritually (Gen. 2:16-17; Ezek. 18:20; James 1:13-15). Physical death is the result of the soul's leaving the body (James 2:26; Gen. 35:18; Ecc. 12:7). When man sins he is separated from God, which is spiritual death (Isa. 59:1-2). If one dies in such a state he will be separated from God for eternity (2 Thess. 1:6-10). Love and compassion should compel us to try to reach the sinner, snatching some out of the fire (Jude 22-23). This is saving a soul from death.

The Scriptures teach that there are blessings of joy which come to those who save a soul from eternal death. Solomon wrote, *"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise"* (Prov. 11:30). Daniel wrote, *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever"* (Dan. 12:3). To his converts at Thessalonica Paul wrote, *"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy"* (1 Thess. 2:19-20).

How does one convert the sinner, the wayward child of God? The methods may differ, depending upon the heart of the sinner (Jude 22-23). The lost sheep was lost due to its own carelessness (Luke 15:3-7); the lost coin was lost due to the carelessness of another (Luke 15:8-10); the lost boy was lost due to a rebellious spirit (Luke 15:11-32). In the case of the first two, the owners diligently sought the lost; but in the latter case, the father let the boy go. Why the difference? I think the reason is that sometimes a heady, rebellious person must reach the depths of degradation and taste the bitter dregs of disgusting sin before he comes to himself. No one can tell him

what to do because he refuses to listen. Some people must end up in the hog pen before they come to their senses, if they ever do. It is sad to say that some pass the point of hope where there is no returning (Heb. 4:4-6).

But to convert a sinner from the error of his way not only saves a soul from death, it hides a multitude of sins. Whose sins are hidden? The one who has done the converting or the one converted? The context indicates it is the one who has been converted whose sins are hidden.

The word "hide" is translated from a Greek word (*kalupto*) which means "to cover, conceal, so that no trace of it can be seen..." (*Vines*, Vol. II, p. 218). Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon defines the word "I. to cover with a thing,...simply to cover,...his hand covered, grasped a stone,...of death,...of grief,...to be buried,...to bury another,...to cover or veil oneself...II. to put over as a covering..." (p. 398). Thayer says the word means "to cover, cover up;...to hide, veil, i.e. to hinder the knowledge of a thing: ...to procure pardon of them from God, Jms. 5:20."

What a wonderful blessing to have one's sins covered so that no trace of them will be seen! The slate has been wiped clean. One's sins are remembered no more (Heb. 8:12). The Psalmist sang, "*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered*" (Psalm 32:1) and again, "*Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah*" (Psalm 85:2).

On March 22, 1998, *The Indianapolis Star* carried a sad article about a man's having carried his brother's corpse down West 10th Street. The dead man had been missing for nine days and his brother found the body and carried it about a quarter of a mile before the authorities came. The man had died apparently from having sniffed paint, because he had paint on his face and hands, according to the report. One who knew the dead man said that he often

sniffed paint to get high. But his brother found him too late.

A spiritual application to the above story is that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are going down the wrong road, missing the sweet fellowship enjoyed in Christ. Will we, like the man above, find our brother or sister too late? If we love them we will seek them out and try to convert them before eternity begins with them or us.

Chapter 22

Coming Home **A Study Of The Prodigal Son** **Luke 15**

Jerry Moffit

Context Of The Parable

It is the time before the "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. Jesus has been shaking the tree of life and parables are falling about for all classes and types of people as they are needed. He heals a man on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6). Bidden to a feast, he teaches on humility (Luke 14:7-13) and on giving to those from whom you can expect no recompense. For the Jews he spake the parable of the slighted invitation [Luke 14:15-24]. It did no good, for, "*he came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not*" (John 1:11).

Great multitudes followed him. Yet, for all the world, it seems as if he is determined to drive them away. On second thought, it seems He just wants to weed them out. He says that the disciples who are worthy of coming to Him must hate their own father and mother, close relatives, one's own life, bear a cross, and then follow Him (Luke 14:26-27). Such as would follow Him are to count the cost, as a builder does before he begins to build, or as a king entering combat. So also a disciple must determine to renounce all he has, even his own life, before he can truly be a disciple.

From all that, one might wonder what type of God we are to serve. When Jesus is roundly criticized for

receiving and eating with publicans and sinners, we soon find out. The God to whom Jesus leads is a caring God. He is a God who rejoices over one sheep who repents and comes back to him ["the lost sheep," Luke 5:3-7]. He is a God who exhibits joy in the presence of angels over one sinner that repents ["the lost piece of silver," Luke 15:8-10]. Jesus will fulfill this theme in triplicate. So he will now talk about the lost son, the prodigal son [Luke 15:11-32].

Content Of The Parable

Jesus tells his judgmental carpenter of a man with two sons. The younger asks for his inheritance early, and the gentle Father gives it. This son goes to a far country, wastes the substance he received, in riotous living and began to suffer severe want in a famine. He hires out to feed pigs, and was so hungry he could eat their food—husks. He decides to return to the Father, not as a son, but as a hired servant. The Father sees him way off, but receives him instead as a repentant son. He kisses him, commands that he be brought a robe, a ring, and shoes. The Father kills the fatted calf and makes a feast. The elder brother, obedient and disciplined, comes home from the fields and becomes disturbed. He was ever at work and received no feast. The Father says, rather, all the Father has is his. Still, it is right to be merry and rejoice, for the son he thought was dead was only lost. Now he has been found.

Technical Information In The Story

Prodigal. This word is late Latin and comes to us from middle English with the Latin *prodigus*, meaning "lavish." It is strange how context can superficially impress us with wrong meaning. Many, unused to the word have a vague sense from the parable that it means "one who wandered away." Yet, it really

means one who is recklessly wasteful or wastefully extravagant, too lavish. This parable in Luke seems to have so influenced the English language that it can now specifically have the meaning of wander away and come back.¹ In the original Greek, Luke uses *diaskorpizō* which meant to scatter, and is metaphorically used of squandering property [Luke 15:13].² The word is used of the unrighteous steward in Luke 16:1 who is accused of “wasting” the rich man’s goods.

Riotous. The word *asotos* in this context has the flavor of “dissolutely.”³ It is a negative form of the word *sozo*, “to save.” So it has the idea of “unsaving” or “unsparing” living. Rienecker says it is used of “debauched and profligate living.”⁴ The older brother spoke of “harlots” (v.30).

Portion. The eldest son always received a double portion [Deut. 21:17]. However, it is very unusual to ask for an inheritance early, though there may have been foolish reasons in this young man’s mind. In essence, it is almost like wishing the father dead and out of his life.⁵

Husks. These may have been carob pods. Israel would eat them in famine and some rabbis said it would drive Israel to repentance.⁶ In all, the idea of pigs’ food would disgust Jesus’ listeners.⁷

Came to self. The words are normal but the expression indicates that he or his mind was gone until that moment.

Splanchnizomai. *Splanchna* is the Greek word for “inwards,” even intestines. In times of emotion these “butterflies” were felt and the ancients thought of that area as the seat of the emotions. So the word is used of “compassion.” The father, when he saw the son afar off was moved with pity. The word is frequently used of Christ’s feelings for the multitudes.⁸ Thayer has the definition, “bowels, intestines [the heart, lungs, liver, etc.].” He says that from the Greek poets down, “the bowels were regarded as the seat of the more violent passions, such as anger and love;

but by the Hebrews as the seat of the tenderer affections, esp. kindness, benevolence, compassion."⁹ Arndt and Gingrich just say it means "have pity, feel sympathy."¹⁰

Kissed. The word is *kataphileo*. When the father saw him afar off, he ran, fell on his neck, and "kissed" his son. This was no formal, or normally appropriate greeting, however. *Kata* intensifies *phileo* and thus it means "to kiss fervently."¹¹ It was a sign of forgiveness.¹²

Ring. Arndt and Gingrich say it's a ring, as *daktulious* means, but they add, "used to seal something."¹³ So Rienecker has, "ring, signet ring. He is to consider himself as his father's deputy."¹⁴

Shoes. On shoes, Rienecker says they are a "sign that the servants accepted him as master."¹⁵ Keener remarks, "Slaves did not normally wear sandals."¹⁶ By shoes, he is accepted as a son. There is an old slave spiritual which repeats, "all God's children have shoes."

Lessons

Let us now look at some lessons we might rightly draw from this parable. Some are expressly taught, some implied, and others are mentioned simply because they might remind this writer of a thought which seems good to express. I will mention these lessons as we would run into them in the story.

Prodigal

First, we should remind all that it is unwise and occasionally sinful to be wasteful. Ah, Lady Wisdom is plain spoken when it comes to waste and extravagance: "*He whose spirit is without restraint is like a city that is broken down and without walls*" (Prov. 24:28). "*Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, Lest thou be filled therewith, and*

vomit it" (Prov. 25:16). *"The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting; but the precious substance of men is to the diligent"* (Prov. 12:27). *"He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich"* (Prov. 21:17).

Stewardship tells us to be good and faithful with God's gifts. I believe Jesus taught such when he fed the five thousand and the four thousand (Matt. 14; 15). They gathered up twelve baskets of fragments and seven baskets of fragments (Matt. 14:20; 15:37).

Here, a common proverb or two tells the end of the story: "A young prodigal, an old beggar" (English proverb). Or, said another way, "young prodigal in a coach will be as old beggar barefoot" (English).

Value Of The Lost

The parable of the prodigal son seems to be the pinnacle of three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The value here is greatest because it is a flesh and blood son. All the language which can be employed to show the value of the son is used. We have the father looking, then running, then forgiving, then giving of needful items, then feasting and rejoicing.

The story of the prodigal reminds us of the chief publican Zacchaeus. He was not only rich, he was a tax-gatherer. Not only so, he would be considered a traitor, and his only friends therefore could most probably be sinners. It can't get much worse than that, except he was little of stature. No wonder the people murmured when Jesus went in to lodge with him that day. Yet Zacchaeus' response for the mere company of Jesus is staggering. And Jesus' response is the most simple and compellingly heart-rending words ever spoken: *"For the son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). We are reminded of a similar occasion when Jesus ate

with Matthew's sinners and publican friends. Of course He was criticized. But the answer is so ennobling that all carpers and cavilers are quiet: *"They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. ¹³But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners"* (Matt. 9:12-13).

A preacher may pay a price for not spending all his time with those reputed to be pillars in the congregation. However, will not God bless him if he allocates his evangelism efforts and teaching with the lost, the weak, the overlooked, and the neglected? God must love the lowly in a congregation; He made so many of them. Soldiers may ride to the sounds of the guns. True Christians run to the sound of a sob, a gasp, or a cry. God seeks out sinners. What do you do as an individual?

The Lust Of The Flesh

Lust, of course, is an individual problem. James said, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: ¹⁴but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed"* (James 1:13-14). However, God seems to have created a testing environment and scheme of redemption where a certain class of people, by honest and good hearts (Luke 8:15), will end up with Him in heaven. Part of the test or environment includes a lust which pervades the world, all that is in opposition to God's will for His last and crowning creation. True, there is "their lust" (Rom. 1:27), and as we saw, one's "own lust" (James 1:14). Yet the language of the Bible presents lust also as an ingredient of flesh (the old man), which imbues the world. So we find lust is that which belongs to the devil. Lust is of and belongs to the world, so the apostle John said,

¹⁵“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

The corruption in life, all, or a great part, is done in some form or fashion through lust. Peter says we have to escape from the *“corruption that is in the world by lust”* (2 Peter 1:4). So, we say all this to make us wary of our heart, our decisions, and our actions. Deep down in our mind, as an archaeologist digs through layers of rubble, we may find we ended up in sin, not because of the good intentions we supposed motivated us. The old enemy lust really moved us, and lust deceived us. Lust is crafty and sly. Paul said, *“that ye put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lust of deceit”* [Eph. 4:22].

Under the figure of warfare, James describes a troubled congregation, one we see far too often:

¹“Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members? ²Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not. ³Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures” [James 4:1-3].

The problem centers in this, “Ye lust, and have not.” The word *epithumia* [lust] “denotes strong desire of any kind.” The word can be used in a good sense, but

almost always it is used in an evil sense. We are not to let sin reign in our mortal body, to obey the lust thereof (Rom. 6:12). In this sense, lust is used of evil desires, even prohibitions. Achan knew the precious things of Jericho were under a ban so that they were devoted to God. Joshua told the fighting men, ¹⁸*"But as for you, only keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest when ye have devoted it, ye take of the devoted thing; so would ye make the camp of Israel accursed, and trouble it. ¹⁹But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are holy unto Jehovah: they shall come into the treasury of Jehovah"* (Josh. 6:18-19). After being defeated at Ai, and thirty-six men of Israel were killed, Achan finally confessed: *"when I saw among the spoil a goodly Babylonish mantle, and two-hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them"* (Josh. 7:21).

Next, lust leads to injustice, too. Solomon said, *"A bribe is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; withersoever it turneth, it prospereth"* (Prov. 17:8). Scripture seems to also speak of a bribe when we read, *"A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men"* (Prov. 18:16).

So, to be succinct, we have some do's and don'ts so far. Don't be prodigal, value the lost as does God, realize our God is kind and merciful, and don't lust. Let us let the story yield more.

The Need For Fellowship

May we especially ask parents and our young to listen up. Because God loves us, He gave us a church, a spiritual family. Because God loves us, we learn that we truly are our brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9). Solomon said, *"He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire, and rageth against all sound wisdom"* (Prov. 18:1). In truth, *"Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise; but the companion of fools shall smart for*

it" [Prov. 13:20]. And, the apostle Paul said, "*Be not deceived; evil companionships corrupt good morals*" (1 Cor. 15:33).

The young man in our story, I believe, went into a far country with his money for the same reason he had already asked for his portion of inheritance early. His heart inclined toward sin, and sinning is not as easily done in the sight of family and friends and religious mentors. To sin, one feels better "way off." I'm sure he said and thought many things forced this decision. A loving mother probably believed them and a kind father, though he had once been a boy himself, probably hoped for the best. I'm sure the younger son was convinced he had to go far away to mold his destiny. However, travel is often useless, because character is destiny. And, "*the heart is deceitful above all things*" (Jer. 17:9). Nevertheless, "*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*" (Prov. 16:25). Again, "*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but Jehovah weigheth the hearts*" (Prov. 21:2).

Young people and parents, be aware that when young adults leave home (the first time, especially), it seems to be the most critical moral time in their life. Parental and loving restraints are absent. Temptation explodes in, usually unchecked.

Jehu, of the northern kingdom, slays two kings, Joram and Ahaziah. Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah usurped the throne (2 Kings 11:1). Joash, son of the king, was saved alive by Johosheba and the priest Jehoiada. Jehoiada in the seventh year made Joash king and Athaliah was slain. Joash was a good king. However, "*Jehoiada waxed old and full of days, and he died*" (2 Chron. 24:15). Under pressure, Joash forsook the house of Jehovah. He served the Asherim and the idols. Prophets tried to turn him back, even Zechariah, the son of good priest Jehoiada. He killed Zechariah. He himself was later slain.

As long as Jehoiada lived, Joash enjoyed good influence. When Jehoiada died, the real test came on Joash. Under pressure of the princes, Joash fell. He was as easily influenced for evil as he once was for good.

Friends, as long as children are home, temptation may be weaker. For sure, temptation is stronger away and afar. When a Christian is in attendance, the pressures to do right can be enormous. Elders, shepherds, know an absent and wandering sheep is a sheep in danger. To delay any form of discipline is to let the deceitfulness of sin harden (Heb. 4:13). When spirituality matures, however, Christians may be like the ones to whom Paul spoke: *"So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"* (Phil. 2:12). Stay together. Don't forsake the assemblies (Heb. 10:24-26). Help the visitation program. It is a very good thing. Help the elders. Be a keeper of brethren. A "far country" is a dangerous country, spiritually.

The Very Good Famine

It seems to me, it is very difficult for us to learn the value of sufferings, afflictions, and chastening from God. It can hardly be denied that there is such a thing as a Bible Belt. Why there is such a thing, and that it is in the South, has frequently been attributed to the South's suffering during the Civil War. I have read that the gangster and reputed murderer, Al Capone, lavishly gave out money in Chicago before his trial for income tax evasion. It was a depression era, and he got headlines for feeding the hungry. He could not believe the same people he fed were of the same mold as those who convicted him. Some historians have said that the depression and a need for God's care drove people to do justice. He was con-

victed. They say, "prosperity lets the reins go free." Or we hear, "Prosperity forgets father and mother." In like manner, sufferings can drive us to God, give us patience, and thereby chastening can bear peaceable fruit, even the fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:10-13; James 1:2-4).

Here in our story, rough times, even a famine, brought the senses of the young son back to himself. David said, *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I may learn thy statutes"* (Psalm 119:71). So we can understand why Paul would announce: *"through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22). And again Paul taught, *"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: ¹⁷and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him"* (Rom. 8:16-18).

Peter explained a little regarding the use by God of sufferings in our life: *"though now for a little while if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, ⁷that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:6-7). So we can understand how Jesus could say, *"As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent"* (Rev. 3:19).

The apostle Paul had to learn the lesson himself. He explained why they had to endure the riot at Ephesus this way: *"Yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raiseth the dead"* (2 Cor. 1:9). This explains why the prodigal son needed a good famine, and it also explains a good deal of the troubles in our life.

Fathers See Far Off

It is healthy doctrine to notice the love of a father and how that love takes form and expresses itself. In the parable the father saw the son "far off." Was he watching? The father ran to the son. Was this a breach of dignity? If so, love takes all precedence over such outward forms.

The truth is, God wants us to see our relationship with Him as a Father/son relationship. David said, "*a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation*" (Psalm 68:5). Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name*" (Matt. 6:9). Jesus explained how a father acts, "*Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; ¹⁰or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent*" (Matt. 7:9-10)? And, God as our Father will do much more.

No, the way the father is in this parable depicts that tender side of God toward us. The Father watches for a returning child, he runs to meet him, he gives the best robe, a ring of authority, shoes which show a reinstatement into the family. Why? because of love that exudes pity. Pity leads to forgiveness, and grace, a means to that forgiveness.

The Most Difficult Lesson For Us

It is probably true of all of us, that self-interest blinds us to the needs of others. They say, "He who looks through jaundiced eyes sees everything yellow." I believe that for us to put ourselves in another's skin or in another's place is the hardest thing of all for the human mind to accomplish. The elder son, like us, must practice contemplation of others. Had not the father suffered enough? Now he has as bad a problem with the elder son as the sinning younger son. The elder son is like the Pharisees. He was dutiful, and he

was clean on the outside. But he had left undone the weightier matters of the law: “*justice, and mercy, and faith*” (Matt. 23:23). This son, as the Pharisees and some part of us, need to hear Jesus’ plea: “*But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners*” (Matt. 9:13).

It is easy to do the externals. We can be driven to it for they are easily seen by others. It is difficult to control the inner man, the heart, the thoughts. This son, so pure in his own eyes, was blind. He could not see the grief in his father’s eyes. He could not be made aware of his father’s pain, nor could he stop and be refreshed by his father’s joy. Yet the father loved him too. He reasons with the unforgiving, and is gentle with the unmerciful. He has something for us all. And truly, it will spring from His love. Paul expressed it so well: “*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things*” (Rom. 8:31-32).

END NOTES

¹The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “prodigal.”

²W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Pub. Co. n.d.), p. 1223.

³Ibid.

⁴Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Lingistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1980), p. 186.

⁵Craig S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), p. 222.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Vine, p. 220.

⁹Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1977], p. 584.

¹⁰William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1973], p. 770.

¹¹Vine, p 636.

¹²Rienecker, p. 187.

¹³William F. Arndt, et.al., p. 169.

¹⁴Rienecker, p. 187.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Keener, p. 233.

Chapter 23

Hope, Not Despair

2 Corinthians 4:6-8

Kent Bailey

The greatest opportunity granted unto humanity is that of becoming a Christian—a member of the one true New Testament church. By acceptance of God's overtures of mercy, in obedience to the saving Gospel of Christ, one has the divine promise (conditioned upon our faithfulness) of eternal fellowship with Deity and all of those redeemed in the paradise of God [John 14:6].

Living faithfully as a Christian will necessitate one's separation from sin both in the world and the church. Such a lifestyle will bring about controversy, division, emotional suffering, and sacrifice. There are those who think that all controversy is a denial of love and is a form of biting and devouring one another [Gal. 5:14-15]. Some think that honorable controversy is nothing more than a striving about of words of no profit and to the subverting of them that hear [2 Tim. 2:14].

As the result of such distortion of God's truth, there is an element within the church, who are for peace at any price, even though it is the price of their own souls. Sadly enough, the concepts of both sacrifice and suffering for the cause of truth is looked upon with little more than contempt.

To the faithful Christian, the message of the New Testament is plain: There are things for which one must be willing to fight, suffer, and yes, even die! Because of the greatness of the promise of eternal life, no sacrifice is too great, nor burden too heavy:

²⁰For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: ²¹Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body; according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself (Phil. 3:20-21).

As we note the promises of God unto His faithful, we can stand assured that the sacrifices made, the burdens borne, and the price that has been paid for our faithfulness, will in eternity pass into oblivion. As we study the scriptures, may we have hope and not despair!

Background Passages For Our Study

As we study the importance of the development of hope and our rejection of despair, we note some important background passages to our text:

The "ministry" spoken of in the context of 2 Corinthians 4:1 is drawn in contrast to the "ministration of death" as found in 2 Corinthians 3:6-18. Since Paul was an apostle of Christ, the context makes it clear that the "spirit" he spoke of was the New Testament, whereas the "letter" is a reference to the Old Testament. "Spirit" is put in contrast with "letter" only to demonstrate the difference in the covenants. The term "spirit," in this text, has no reference to the Holy Spirit as a person, but rather to His message of the New Covenant. It is nothing less than rank Calvinism to advocate that this passage describes some far out notion that God, in some direct way today, communicates His instruction separate and apart from His revealed word. Paul noted:

¹⁶And that from a child thou has known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in

Christ Jesus. ¹⁷All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect throughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Our Lord stated: *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my word, hath one that judgeth him: The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"* (John 12:48).

God has always communicated His will unto man by His word. At one point of time, the word of God existed exclusively within inspired men. It later existed partially within inspired men and partially within written form. Now, however, such exists exclusively within the inspired book—The Bible. To conclude otherwise is to deny the all sufficiency of the scriptures, and to open the flood gates of subjectivism.

The letter is stated to "kill" because it pronounces divine condemnation on men because of their sins without providing a means of true justification in its animal sacrifices (Gal. 3; Acts 13:39; Heb. 10:4). While certainly it is the case that faithful Jews, living under the Law of Moses, were in fellowship with God, such was attained by God passing over their sin with anticipation of the atoning death of Christ (Heb. 9:15-17).

Many have failed to understand this fundamental truth and have sought to justify themselves and their actions by appealing to the Old Covenant. We note this problem in the first century church (Acts 15; Gal. 1:6-9; 3:16-19). There were Hebrew Christians considering giving up their fellowship with Christ and returning to Old Testament Judaism (Heb. 10:23-29).

While some become apostate from the truth, others are so closed minded that they never give careful attention to the evidence proving the validity

of the case of God's Scheme of Redemption. Some, even today, desire to follow an abrogated law (Heb. 9:15-17). Paul indicated that as Moses had a veil over his face, so as to not blind the people because of the glory of God; a spiritual veil continued to exist over the eyes of those, who continued to follow the Old Testament:

13...and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: 14but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament: which veil is done away in Christ. 15But even unto this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts. 16Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. 17Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord [2 Cor. 3:13-18].

Upon the basis of this "ministry," Paul affirmed the reception of God's mercy in obedience to the Gospel of Christ. He did not faint, but rather did renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully [2 Cor. 4:1-2].

Paul noted that if the true Gospel of Christ be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those, who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them [2 Cor. 4:3-4].

In spite of the fact that the Gospel of Christ is God's exclusive power to bring salvation to all who obey [Rom. 1:16-17], the vast majority of humanity will reject the truth and remain in a lost condition. The Holy Spirit moved Paul to so state that because of such, those faithfully proclaiming God's truth did not preach themselves, but rather were simply servants of Christ and His truth [2 Cor. 4:5].

An Analysis Of 2 Corinthians 4:6-8

In noting the truth of 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 with regard to the preaching of Christ; one *must* preach the following:

1. The facts about the nature of Christ, i.e., His eternal pre-existence, His virgin conception, incarnation, birth, death, burial, resurrection and ascension [John 1:1-14; 1 Cor. 15:1-4].
2. His divine pattern given to alien sinners enabling them to receive remission of sins. This pattern requires faith in the Deity of Christ, repentance of personal sin, confession of Christ, and baptism in order to the remission of sins [John 1:12; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:38].
3. The church of Christ, for such comprises all of those who have upon their repentance of sin and confession of faith been baptized into Christ and thus are covenant children of God [Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13-14; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4].
4. The authority of Christ, for all power has been delegated unto Him by the eternal Father [Matt. 28:18; 1 Peter 3:22; Col. 3:17].

Not only are particular facts included in the preaching of Christ, but also there are proper motives assigned in our text. As God brought light out of darkness in the creation of the universe, so is the light of God's truth given unto us by the means of such being proclaimed. Paul wrote:

¹For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for you Gentiles; ²if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: ³how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, ⁴whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ⁵which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is so now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; ⁶that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: ⁷whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. ⁸Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; ⁹and to make all men see what is the fellowship of mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: ¹⁰to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God... (Eph. 3:1-10).

Another motive for proclamation of truth is recognition for just exactly what this truth really is—*"treasure in earthen vessels"* (2 Cor. 4:7). The Gospel is indeed precious. Christ stated that the kingdom (church) was compared to a pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44-46). The blood of Christ is described as being precious, in that it was the purchase price of this church (1 Peter 1:18-19; Acts 20:28). The case being that the Gospel is the seed of the kingdom (church) the two are essentially linked (Luke 8:11).

Such a treasure as the Gospel is referred to as being stored in earthen vessels. When God's truth was in humanity it had to be confirmed by miracles. The apostles (and other miraculously endowed men) performed such signs as a demonstration of the veracity of this treasure. Now, the word of God exists in the form of the inspired book and does not need confirmation (1 Cor. 13:8-13). The phrase "earthen vessels" applies exclusively to the apostles of Christ, for such is indicative of their divine inspiration. While Paul, as well as all other writers of the New Testament, by plenary verbal inspiration had within them the Gospel of Christ; such did not prevent them from difficulties. In fulfilling his work, Paul suffered many problems.

²³Are they the ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. ²⁴Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. ²⁵Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶in journeyings often, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. ²⁸Beside those things without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

In 2 Corinthians 4:8, Paul identifies four particular difficulties:

1. He was troubled (oppressed, crowded, squeezed in), yet not distressed (crushed or straitened).

2. He was perplexed (uncertain as to which way to turn), but not in despair (totally at a loss).
3. He was persecuted (pressed with malignity), but not forsaken (abandoned).
4. He was cast down (thrown down), but not destroyed (ruined). Paul, in spite of all the problems he faced as a faithful Christian, had hope not despair!

All Faithful Christians Must Face The Reality Of Various Problems That We Shall Face In This Life

While it would truly be wonderful to face no problems in living one's life as a faithful child of God, such will never be the case! Peter wrote:

¹Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered for us in the flesh hath ceased from sin; ²that he no longer should live the rest of his life in sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. ³For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings and abominable idolatries: ⁴wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot speaking evil of you... [1 Peter 4:1-4].

Suffering for the cause of Christ is no shame, but rather a fellowship with Christ in standing for truth (1 Peter 4:12-16). All of the great people of God were recipients of dealing with various problems. David, Job, Jeremiah, Paul, and even Jesus Christ himself suffered great trials.

Discouragement Is A Common Factor Of Life With Which All Faithful Christians Must Contend

Discouragement comes in various forms and in different ways, depending upon the circumstances. Primarily, discouragement comes in two classifications: both personal and collective. Personal discouragement attacks us as individuals, whereas, collective discouragement attacks local congregations.

Discouragement may be brought about by family matters. Possibly a marriage is not developing as patterned in the scriptures, or perhaps, children may cause worry and concern to parents.

One may become discouraged due to moral problems. In the battle between flesh and spirit, many times, due to the strength of temptations, individuals may give in to various weaknesses of alcohol, unauthorized sex practices, dishonesty, lying, or even laziness.

One can become discouraged over spiritual matters, i.e., mates becoming discouraged over the unbelief of their spouses, or as unfaithful children of God having no interest in spiritual things. It could be one becomes stagnant in their spiritual growth and begins to wane in faithfulness. Christ may not mean as much as He once did, or as He should, prayers seem to go unanswered, attendance at the worship assemblies are burdensome.

Indeed, all of God's faithful become very discouraged with regard to the present apostasy that we are facing within the church. We are faced with militant errorists such as Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Jeff Walling, F. Lagard Smith, Terry Rush, and Marvin Phillips.

Others bring discouragement to our lives due to the fact that they defend false teachers, or else they take such a generic approach to the issues in which we are involved they refuse to stand in defense of

God's truth. The only attack they make is upon those who faithfully stand in defense of the Gospel.

God's faithful become discouraged regarding atheistic, humanistic, materialism. The rejection of the Gospel by those lost, the stubborn rebellion of the backslider to return, and the indolence of various brethren regarding the work of the local church.

The challenges we face are indeed real. Therefore we must work with all of our might to overcome such, being victorious in Christ!

In Spite Of Discouragement, We Can Have Hope Rather Than Despair

By "hope" we refer to expectation. Such comes from faith, and faith is based upon knowledge brought about by credible evidence (Heb. 11:1). In contrast to "hope" the antithesis is that of despair. By such we refer to that of total loss. An attitude of despair is sinful because it destroys one's faith in God and brings one to a point where God's truth is both repudiated and rejected.

While it is the case that it is universal for all Christians to become discouraged, we must never fall into despair. But how can we prevent such in our lives? By refusing to give up and building strong personal faith in God (2 Tim. 1:12). The writer of Hebrews sought to solidify Christians:

¹⁷Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: ¹⁸that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, one might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. ¹⁹Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast, and which

entereth into that within the veil... [Heb. 6:17-19].

In spite of our discouragement, we can look to Christ the “author and finisher of our faith.” When faced with discouragement, may we always take note of the pattern that He left us to follow.

Jesus Christ did not give up. He recognized that the key to all difficult situations was in Him, not in the obstacles that He faced. Discouragement is a condition of mind, not of outside circumstances. Joy is not contingent upon where you are, but rather upon who you are.

Jesus Christ took a higher view of all situations. The higher you are the further you can see. He encouraged His followers to have the same perspective [John 4:35]. No matter what happens in this life, all will turn out well in eternity if we are faithful in accomplishing God’s will [Rom. 8:28].

Jesus Christ continued to work. When our Lord was blocked in one direction, He patiently looked in another. When nothing was left to accomplish other than His atoning death on the cross, He died willingly and confidently looking to the resurrection and His ascension. At crucial moments in life, various things may not turn out as we would hope or have planned. This leads to discouragement. Whenever such is our lot, do not sink into despair, for Christ is our example. Keep doing the will of God with all of your heart.

Jesus Christ always prayed. When meeting conflict, our Lord was sustained by going to His Father in prayer [Matt. 14:23; Luke 5:16; 6:12; Matt. 26:36-42]. Because of such examples, we as Christians must be individuals of prayer [Luke 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17]. When we face disappointment, we can receive strength by the spiritual blessing of prayer.

Conclusion

We are facing the problems of apostasy, materialism, and worldliness making entrance into the church with great rapidity. We must not grow weary in well doing unto that of despair. We must fight the good fight of the faith with a view to receiving eternal life in the hereafter.

When we understand the ultimate victory in Christ accomplished by following His divine scheme of redemption, we will have hope and not despair!

Chapter 24

Love The Brotherhood

1 Peter 2:17

Gary Colley

It is always a joy to be associated with the fine brethren at Garfield Heights. The elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, young people, and every member seem to exemplify Christianity at its best. Generosity with the speakers prevails, and is greatly appreciated. Brother Charles Blair, director, and one of our finer preachers in the brotherhood, along with his good family who work closely with him, are always very helpful in the Lectureship. Each year seems to top the last in respect to the theme, subjects, and speakers. No theme could be more needful than "*Love The Brotherhood.*"

Introduction

Two of the most interesting words in the New Testament are the words love and brotherhood. Especially is this true when the two words are applied together in the Bible. When God called us together in Christ by the cross, He brought us into the body of Christ for our salvation. Love lifted us to heights of blessings as "*fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*" [Eph. 2:19]. We are members one of another, who are to care one for another.

In our present study, we need to learn: All that is contained in the word love; What is the brotherhood spoken of by Peter; What is involved in loving the brotherhood; Who are our brothers and sisters in this

[Heb. 1:9]. We must remember that love *"rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth"* [1 Cor. 13:6].

Conclusion

Having learned that love in the New Testament has to do with our action of concern and interest for those of like precious faith in Jesus Christ, we know that it is applied by Peter to mean concern and interest for the Christian brotherhood. This brotherhood is made up of those who have obeyed the Gospel and have come into Christ, where the gift of the Holy Spirit, or new life, and eternal hope is found [Acts 2:38; 26:18; John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6].

Let us truly show our love of the brotherhood by continuing to work, study, and grow [2 Peter 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:15]. Let us go on unto perfection, being doers of the Word and not hearers only [Heb. 6:1; 2 Peter 1:5-11; James 1:22-25]. Let us abide in the true vine, remaining faithful members of the body of Christ, the church of Christ [John 15:1-5; Col. 1:18; Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rev. 14:13]. These things show our love for the brotherhood!

Remember, Peter had already written, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently"* [1 Peter 1:22].

Paul wrote the exhortation to the Roman Christians, *"Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy, ASV]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good"* [Rom. 12:9].

This brotherhood on earth will not be broken by physical death, but the faithful brotherhood will together live throughout all the endless ages of eternity.

The beloved apostle John wrote in his book of First John, *"In this the children of God are manifest,*

The action of love will not cause us to misuse others to gain some “victory” for ourselves. Love is always trusting in the words and actions of another until reason for doubt is evident. Love will cause hope to spring up in our lives, as we look to the promises of God. And, love will always preserve its possessor, helping one to be steadfast in the faith of the Gospel. Maintaining love in our lives demands our best efforts, like *“endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,”* in the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God [Eph. 4:1-6].

A Badge To Be Worn

It is worthy of stating here that love is the vital principle of the Christian life! It is that action without which all other endowments are useless and vain. When we learn what love in the Bible means, we shall know what the Lord meant when he assigned it as the badge of discipleship. Jesus stated to His disciples, *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another”* [John 13:34-35].

The law of Christ commanded love as a fundamental law to Christians! In harmony with the teaching of our Lord, and in regard to our care for one another, Paul wrote to the Galatian brethren, *“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* [Gal. 6:2]. Likewise he wrote, *“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* [Gal. 6:10]. So, we find Peter writing, *“Honor all men, Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king”* [1 Peter 2:17].

Another View Of Love

On the other side of the coin, John was very emphatic about love being absent or inefficient, when it comes to our brethren! He says, *"He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even unto now"* [1 John 2:9]. Again he writes, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. ¹⁵He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"* [1 John 3:14-15].

Further, John points out the extent to which hatred in the heart defiles the Christian, even separating him from God. *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen"* [1 John 4:20]?

Who Constitutes The Brotherhood

The events of Peter's life serve to describe almost every trait in the lives of members of the church today! By members of the church today, we are speaking of those who have been saved by the blood of Christ and have come into the body of Christ, the church [Acts 20:28; Rom. 6:3-4; Eph. 1:7; Acts 2:38, 41,47].

Peter's Words Important

One of the most interesting personalities in the New Testament is one called Simon son of Jonas, or Cephas, meaning Peter, a small stone. There is a great depth of thought presented by the inspired apostle Peter in his two New Testament books. Who could cause us to understand, and better remember, the need to loving the brotherhood than one with the

background of Peter! After denying three times at the trial of the Lord that he knew Him (Matt. 26:69-70,72, 74; Mark 14:68,71), he is the one to whom the Lord said three times, "*Lovest thou me*" (John 21:15-17)? Each time his answer was to the Lord, "*Thou knowest I love thee.*" Jesus then told him, "*feed my sheep.*"

In the second epistle of Peter, he states his intent in writing. Emphasizing the need of all Christians, he says,

¹³“as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up putting you in remembrance; ¹⁴Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. ¹⁵Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance” [2 Peter 1:13-15].

As a fire is stirred to brighten its appearance and bring greater warmth, so Peter wanted to “stir” our pure minds to remembrance and faithfulness in love. How great the encouragement of his words, he being an inspired apostle! The Holy Spirit certainly knew the great needs of all, and so directs the writing of Peter!

New born babes in Christ must be taught that they are to love the brotherhood genuinely, and that they are to avoid mere pretense. Peter says, “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently*” [1 Peter 1:22]. And again Peter concludes, “*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous*” [1 Peter 3:8].

"Love The Brotherhood"

Without doubt, Peter wrote to Christians, those who had entered the body of Christ. Though there has long been disagreement concerning the exact identity of those to whom Peter wrote, as well as from what place the letters were written, and where he died, there can be no doubt or disagreement that he wrote to and loved the brotherhood. Neither is there doubt that he wanted us to do the same! We do know that he wrote, by the Holy Spirit, for all "*that have obtained a like precious faith*" (2 Peter 1:1). Therefore, the teaching is applicable to members of the church of Christ everywhere, for every individual who makes up the brotherhood, not only then, but even for us today.

Sundry Exhortations

"Love" in the New Testament most certainly contains two important ingredients, concern and interest. If two people love God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, they must love one another. Peter certainly shows, in 1 Peter 2, his love for the brotherhood by the guidelines he gives and wants us to remember for living as a Christian. Connected with the proper love for the brotherhood are certain actions commanded by the inspired apostle Peter which we all are to follow. We are exhorted to:

- Lay aside all evil from our lives (2 Peter 2:1);
- Desire the sincere milk of the Word of God as a baby desires its milk (v.2);
- Remember the Lord is gracious (v.3);
- Remember we are chosen of God, and precious (v.4);
- That we are required to offer acceptable worship (v.5);

- We are to remember Christ is the head of the church, though knowing He is a stumbling block to the disobedient [vs.6-8];
- And that we remember we are a holy nation, the people of God [vs.9-10].
- Likewise, to have the proper attitude in Christ, we must view ourselves as “*strangers and pilgrims*” abstaining from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.
- As we journey toward Heaven, we are to live honestly before all, honor the laws of the land, and not use our “*liberty as a cloak of maliciousness*” [vs.11-16].
- It is then, that the Holy Spirit through Peter commands and gives Peter’s summation,

“Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:17).

Peter’s Former Life

The background of Peter’s life underscores his writing, and is of interest and importance to our study. His life, previous to the establishment of the church of Christ on Pentecost, is generally well known by every one. He was born to Jonas (John 1:42), beginning his walk on earth in Bethsaida (John 1:44). Later, he made his home and livelihood in Capernaum where he was a fisherman (Luke 4:38). He no doubt knew of and studied the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and readily received the Lord’s invitation to follow Him when called (Matt. 4:18-20).

His lowly fisherman’s life wrought the occurrence of many lessons taught by our Lord, serving to illustrate to Peter and others how, in love for lost souls, they are to become fisher’s of men. Peter’s name is always first in the listing of the apostles, and

is one of twelve who was personally chosen and sent by the Lord to seek the souls of men [Luke 19:10].

The chosen apostles' only power was the Lord's power. They went forth into the world preaching the powerful Gospel of the crucified Saviour [2 Peter 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:2]. The Lord taught these personally chosen and trained twelve men for three or more years. The power of the Holy Spirit was promised to come to them after Christ's ascension, to equip them with power from on high, for the enormous work of carrying the Gospel to the world [Luke 24:46-49; John 16:13; Mark 16:15-16].

"A Servant And An Apostle Of Jesus Christ" [2 Peter 2:1]

In Peter's love for the brotherhood, he delights in describing himself as being a servant [bondservant], and an apostle [one sent], of Jesus Christ. Peter, of necessity understood, as should we, that the servant of Jesus Christ must likewise love other servants of Jesus Christ. Though Paul had to withstand Peter to the face *"because he was to be blamed"* [Gal. 2:11], it was done in the proper manner that love demands. Peter evidently took the correction in this way, and later commended the writings of *"our beloved brother Paul"* of which he said the *"unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction"* [2 Peter 3:15-16].

The number of the apostles were made up of very humble, but great men, who were without worldly recognition, and were considered by the worldly as nothing in rank, birth, or education, though these are the things upon which men so depend today. We need to remember these as examples for us today! Yet, in the love and power given them by Christ [Matt. 10:19-20], they were able to stand in the presence of kings and the councils of men without difficulty.

In the first persecution after the church was established, they were bold to say to the rulers, who were also the murderers of Jesus, and who could have put them to death, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:13).

The next verse of the record says, *"Now when they [the rulers, elders, scribes, and others] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."*

A Closer Look

It was Peter who said in our text, *"Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king"* (1 Peter 2:17). This powerful verse serves as a word picture, or a summation statement, for duties of the Christian life. It illustrates for all, that love in the Bible is not the sticky, syrupy, outwardly pretentious look, that some assign to the meaning of love today. Love is the mainspring of action! That action is the strength of our lives, being used in doing the commandments of the Lord, as we strive to help our fellowbrother and thereby help ourselves. Please note these important phrases briefly and individually:

"Honor all men" teaches us to treat all men justly and kindly; to *"owe no man anything, save to love one another"* (Rom. 13:8).

"Fear God" means to offer at all times the due reverence and respect to God and sacred things. The deepest respect and reverence is certainly due to our benevolent God (John 3:16-17). When Jesus taught His disciples in the manner of prayer, He taught them to address God as *"Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name"* (Matt. 6:9). Paul taught the Hebrew brethren to come before God *"with reverence*

and awe" (Heb. 12:28; cf. Isa. 66:3,5). In following these divine instructions and showing proper respect and reverence to our Heavenly Father today, we show the proper respect for God, and the proper love and example for our brethren in Christ.

"Honor the King" teaches us our responsibility toward rulers of the land in which we live. This in principle would also apply to all those who are in lesser offices of Government [Rom. 13].

"Paul's Love For The Brotherhood"

We have set this phrase apart because of our present study and in order to give it closer attention. *"Love the brotherhood"* is a thought containing so many important actions on our part! It means that we are always to have interest and concern from the heart for the brotherhood. It expresses, by action, our love for all of our fellow-travelers, the saved in Christ, whom we now enjoy as our family because they are God's spiritual children. The apostles were shining examples for what love for the brotherhood really means. *Their love was a great love.* Paul wrote to the brethren at Philippi, *"How I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 1:8). *Their love was a constant love.* These men felt a heavy responsibility to their converts, loving them deeply and constantly. *Their love was an increasing love.* As the brethren went through their trials and overcame their persecutions, the love for them increased greatly. So is it true today! How we today should love those older veterans, stalwart soldiers of the Cross, who have lived for Christ and borne the heat of the battle! *Their love was a sharing love.* While the brethren had stood by the authority of the apostles, strengthened their hands for their battles, and supported them with their funds, they were sharing together their great love for the brotherhood.

Our Love For The Brotherhood

Peter was present when the disciples had a “fuss” over who would be the greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18). He had heard and seen the Lord settle the matter by calling a little child into his midst, showing that pride and ambition must be replaced by love. It is amazing what Christians can accomplish when no one cares who receives the credit! Jesus forbids any of the brotherhood to exalt one above another. He said *“all ye are brethren”* (Matt. 8-12).

We are commanded to show our love for the brotherhood by being faithful to the Lord’s commands (Matt. 7:21-22). Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). John wrote, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous”* (1 John 5:3). Again, *“He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”* (1 John 2:4). For those then who claim to “know” the Lord and “keep His commandments” but do not abide in the Truth, no matter how sincere they may appear before men, they show that they do not love Jesus Christ the Son of God! Paul also wrote of the way we show our love, saying, *“Let us hold fast the profession [confession, GC] of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised; ²⁴And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Heb. 10:23-25).

We show our love for the brotherhood by standing up for the Truth against error. We are commanded to watch and stand fast in the faith against error (1 Cor. 16:13; Jude 3; Eph. 5:11). We are to remember our Lord’s example and follow it! He “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity,” the result being that God anointed him with the oil of gladness above others

[Heb. 1:9]. We must remember that love *"rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth"* [1 Cor. 13:6].

Conclusion

Having learned that love in the New Testament has to do with our action of concern and interest for those of like precious faith in Jesus Christ, we know that it is applied by Peter to mean concern and interest for the Christian brotherhood. This brotherhood is made up of those who have obeyed the Gospel and have come into Christ, where the gift of the Holy Spirit, or new life, and eternal hope is found [Acts 2:38; 26:18; John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6].

Let us truly show our love of the brotherhood by continuing to work, study, and grow [2 Peter 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:15]. Let us go on unto perfection, being doers of the Word and not hearers only [Heb. 6:1; 2 Peter 1:5-11; James 1:22-25]. Let us abide in the true vine, remaining faithful members of the body of Christ, the church of Christ [John 15:1-5; Col. 1:18; Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rev. 14:13]. These things show our love for the brotherhood!

Remember, Peter had already written, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently"* [1 Peter 1:22].

Paul wrote the exhortation to the Roman Christians, *"Let love be without dissimulation [hypocrisy, ASV]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good"* [Rom. 12:9].

This brotherhood on earth will not be broken by physical death, but the faithful brotherhood will together live throughout all the endless ages of eternity.

The beloved apostle John wrote in his book of First John, *"In this the children of God are manifest,*

and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (3:10-11). "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (3:16). "My little children, let us not live in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (3:18).

Let us all seek to *"Love the brotherhood."*

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