

JESUS: THE MASTER TEACHER

2006

The 32nd Annual Lectureship
East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions
Knoxville, Tennessee

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JESUS: THE MASTER TEACHER

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DEDICATION



This year's dedication of the lectureship book goes to a very devoted husband and wife. Their contribution to the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions is considerable. Laboring behind the scenes in roles far from the limelight, these good people have worked for almost twenty-five years to insure the financial stability of the school.

Well beyond their administrative roles, however, has been their personal involvement with the school in contributions well outside any job description. Wise counsel, sacrificial giving, reaching out to touch the students, and being an example of Christian dedication, add much to the school's indebtedness to these good people.

As a family they have shown a balanced, compassionate parenting style that has significantly impacted their children and stands as a strong example to other families. Active in evangelism, sacrificial in giving, compassionate in reaching out, the recipients of this volume's dedication, Gregg and Sherrye Woodall, exemplify the values upon which ETSPM solidly rests. May God continue to bless them and grant them long lives of service to the Christ.

Edwin Jones
For the Elders and Staff

PREFACE

It is a great privilege to be able to serve as Director of the East Tennessee School of Preaching Lectures. This will be the thirty-second lectureship of the school.

Soon after the 2005 lectures were completed the Lectureship Committee began planning for 2006. It was decided that Christ: The Master Teacher would be the theme of the 2006 Lecture. The greatest teacher the world has ever known can teach us great lessons.

Forty men and women have spent valuable time in research and writing of manuscripts. Sunday morning speakers will be Perry Cotham who is 93 years of age and has been preaching 77 years and V. P. Black, who is in his eighties. Winford Claiborne (also in his eighties) and Sam Bartrug will be the afternoon speakers.

Daily speakers will be Clarence DeLoach (The Sermon on the Mount), Tom Holland (Hard Sayings of Jesus), and Marlin Connelly (The Olivet Discourse). The night speakers will be James Meadows (Forgiveness), Phil Sanders (The Good Samaritan), Dan Chambers (The Prodigal Son), and Lovell Hayes (The Seed and the Sower).

The ladies' classes will be presented by six different women – Kathy Hartwigsen, Melissa Webster, Irene Taylor, Jane Brown, Suzanne Brockenborough, and Ira Booker. Large crowds attend these classes.

Several of our alumni will be speakers on the program. Space will not allow mention of all the speakers, but they are well qualified and will bring great lessons.

Our thanks to Charles Brown who read and made corrections where needed in the manuscripts. Our dedicated secretary, Nell Rich, did a tremendous job in coordinating the material. Amparo Henderson typed all the manuscripts and made them camera-ready for the book. Our special thanks to Wallace

Alexander and the Gospel Light Publishing Company for printing the book.

We pray that this study of the lessons taught by Jesus: The Master Teacher will help each of us become more like him. May God bless each of us, not only with the desire to learn, but with the willingness to practice what we learn.

James Meadows, Director
32nd ETSPM Lectures

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I GENERAL LESSONS

The Master Teacher: "Never Man Spake Like This Man"	
Perry Cotham	1
Stewardship: The Widow's Mite	
V. P. Black	14
The Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 1	
Clarence DeLoach	24
The Sermon on the Mount – Lesson 2	
Clarence DeLoach	29
The Master on Prayer – Lesson 3	
Clarence DeLoach	34
Hard Sayings of Jesus: An Overview – Lesson 1	
Tom Holland.....	39
Hard Sayings of Jesus: Bear the Cross – Lesson 2	
Tom Holland.....	48
Hard Sayings of Jesus: "Love As I Have Loved" – Lesson 3	
Tom Holland.....	57
The Olivet Discourse	
Marlin Connelly	67
Overcoming Temptation	
Paul Sain.....	82
Jesus and the Holy Spirit	
Robert Taylor, Jr.	99
Figures of Speech	
David Pharr	108
Admonitions to Abiding Faithfulness	
William Woodson	119
Jesus: Our Example of Obedience	
Steve Brown.....	124

SECTION II SPECIAL STUDIES

What Jesus Said About Divorce	
Winfred Claiborne	138
Words from the Cross	
Sam Bartrug.....	149

What Jesus Taught About Hell	
Allen Webster.....	157
Emotions of Jesus	
Lonnie Smith, Jr.....	193
The Teaching Style of Jesus	
Edwin Jones.....	202
The Example of Compassion	
Charles Brown	216
Jesus: The Good Shepherd	
Tim Forlines	225
Person-to-Person With Jesus	
Tom Miller	236
The Cost of Discipleship: "A Study of Discipleship in Luke"	
Bob Cowles.....	249
The Model Prayer	
Dennis Curd.....	265
The Wedding Feast	
Bill Nicks	273
Teaching by Example	
Rod Rutherford	279

SECTION III ALUMNI

Evangelism	
Neil Richey.....	290
I Will Build <u>My</u> Church	
Jerry Carmichael.....	299
The Fish Net	
Clancy Etienne.....	310

SECTION IV NIGHT SPEAKERS

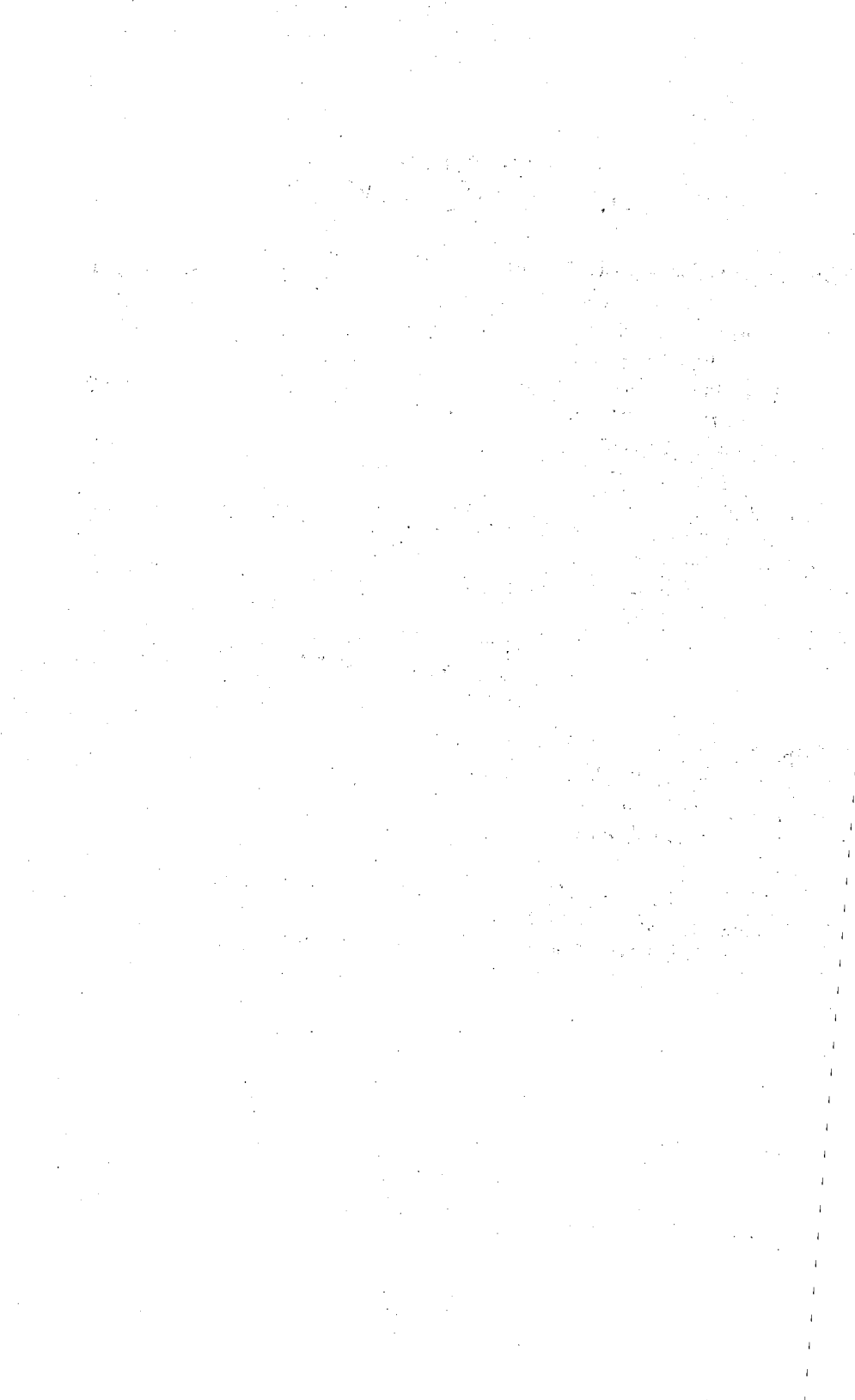
Forgiveness	
James Meadows	320
The Good Samaritan	
Phil Sanders.....	334
The Seed and the Sower	
Lovell Hayes	343

**SECTION V
LADIES' SPECIAL CLASSES**

She Hath Done What She Could	
Kathryn Hartwigsen.....	354
One Thing is Needful	
Melissa Webster	362
Jesus and Mary Magdalene	
Irene Taylor	389
The Power of Service	
Jane Brown	398
Mary at the Tomb	
Suzanne Brockenborough	406
Jairus' Daughter	
Ira Booker	415

**SECTION VI
STUDENT SPEAKERS**

The Tares	
Allan Fowell.....	424
The Mustard Seed	
Steven Lucas	430
The Leaven	
Friday Paul Okure	436
The Pearl of Great Price	
Shane Robinson	443

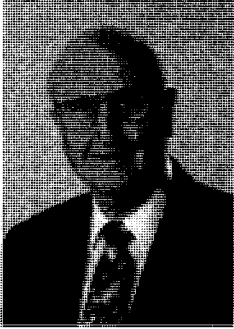


SECTION I
GENERAL LESSONS

"NEVER MAN SPAKE LIKE THIS MAN"

JOHN 7:32-46

PERRY B. COTHAM



Perry Cotham was born of Christian parents in Murray, KY. He began preaching in 1929. He graduated from Freed-Hardeman College and then Murray State College where he received his B. A. degree. Full-time local work with churches in OK and TX. Full-time world-wide evangelistic work since 1972, preaching in all states of America and in all the inhabited continents of the world, including over 70 nations. Authored sixteen tracts and three public debate books. He contributes many thousands of tracts and Bibles each year. He and his wife Teresa (deceased) have three children.

Jesus Christ was the world's greatest teacher. To study the life of Christ – **who** He was, **what** He was, and what He **taught** – is a great study. Probably no one knows how many volumes have been written directly relating to Jesus Christ and His teachings, and it would be guesswork to even attempt an estimate. Perhaps over 10,000 books have been written about Christ in our language during the last 300 years, besides hundreds that have been written in other languages.

The text for our study is the statement recorded by the apostle John in his biography of Christ, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46 KJV).¹ We learn why this statement was made by reading the context, John 7:32-45. Jesus was in the temple in Jerusalem on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. He had boldly answered the criticisms of some of the scribes and Pharisees. He had mentioned that He had come from God, the

Father. So, they "sent officers to take him," but no one laid hands on Him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees (those that sent them, PBC); and they said unto them, "Why have ye not brought him?" Then "the officers answered, Never man spake like this man." Evidently the officers were so impressed and awed with what Jesus said that they dared not to take Him.

The Sanhedrin likely was assembled and waiting for the return of the officers, but they were so impressed with what He said that they failed to take Him. Hearing Jesus talk, they were convinced of His innocence. This is how they explained why they had not taken Him. So, the court broke up without the Christ being brought.

This report of the officers has passed into a true saying; it is as true now as it was when first spoken: "Never man spake like this man." It shall be our desire in this study, therefore, to listen to Christ and to learn from Him. We want to note a few examples from Scripture to show that Jesus spake as no man ever spoke. He was and continues to be a teacher without peer in the world's history. We cannot separate Jesus from Christianity. So, what of His words?

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

Christ spoke of His pre-existence. In His prayer to the Father before going to the cross, He said: "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Of course, the finite cannot fully comprehend the infinite, but Jesus' claim to be Divine, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, is a fundamental teaching in true Christianity. Did any man in the flesh ever say that he was divine, that is, eternal, and prove it by his life and teaching? The answer is NO! So in this regard, "Never man spake like this man."

The eternal One was "the Word," wrote John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-2, 14).

Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and lived among men and finally died on the cross to save us from our sins (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:21). "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). Jesus Christ thus became the only begotten Son of God, and God gave Him up to suffer and die on the cross. He tasted "death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). God's design in sending Christ into the world is that the world through Him might be saved (2 Pet. 3:9). There is no salvation in any other (Acts 4:12), and only the true, obedient believer will be saved or have everlasting life in heaven.

There are two opinions, or verdicts, about Jesus Christ:

1. When the little ship reached the land after the storm on the Sea of Galilee, after Jesus had walked on the water and stilled the tempest, His disciples worshipped Him, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33).
2. The other verdict is of the scribes and Pharisees who went to Pilate and asked for a guard at the tomb, lest His disciples come and steal the body and pretend that He was risen from the dead. They explained their fears in this way: "That deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again" (Matt. 27:63).

Which was He? The "Son of God" or "that deceiver"? This is important, for if Christ were not and is not divine, the only begotten Son of God, as He claimed to be, then He was a deceiver, an imposter, the worst of the ages. But Christ claimed attributes, powers, and authority that belonged only to God.

- He claimed moral perfection. He once asked His enemies: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46).
- He claimed the right to judge all men and allot to them their eternal destiny (Matt. 25:31-46).

Four great miracles in the life of Christ attest to His Divinity:

1. His incarnation by the virgin Mary;
2. His sinless life and teaching;
3. His resurrection from the dead; and
4. His ascension back to the Father in heaven, now seated at the Father's right hand.

Once when the religious Jews were talking with Christ, they said, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:57-58). Jesus claimed that He had always been, the Eternal One. He lived before Abraham. God said to Moses at the burning bush, "I AM THAT I AM" (Exo. 3:14). God has always been, and always shall be.

The Jews said that Jesus was not yet fifty years old, and He could not, therefore, have seen Abraham. Jesus replied that He existed before Abraham. Of course, He could not have if He were a mere man, but He was more than a man. Thus, it was John's design in writing his book to prove by the life and teaching of Christ that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, and man's only Savior (John 20:31).

THE DIVINE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Never a man spake like Christ when He said to Peter, following Peter's confession of faith in Him as the Son of God, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Men have built their churches (and still do), but Christ built His church. Christ also stated that the church is the kingdom (Matt. 16: 19) and that it would come or be established at the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit to the apostles (Mark 9: 1). The Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2: 1-4; Luke 24:49). This is the exact day and the exact place when the Lord's church began. Following this day, the saved were added by the Lord to the church as they were being saved, or "those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47 NASB). The Lord's' church still exists

today, and all the saved are still being added to it. One does not "join" the Lord's church.

Universally, the Lord's church is one body over which Christ is the head (Eph. 1:21-22; 4:1-4; 1 Cor. 12:20). But there are many groups (congregations) of saved people, Christians (Acts 11:26), all over the world. They are called "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16; cf. Rev. 2-3). Each congregation (church) is an independent unit under Christ, with its elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1), men who are qualified to be such (cf. Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). Too, "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25), and "It shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

Christians are God's *called out* ones, by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), having been added to the church by the Lord. Hence, the Jerusalem church, and all others established by apostolic authority in the first century, as recorded in the New Testament, are our pattern for the Lord's true church today. By a careful reading of the Word of God, we learn the plan of salvation, the organization and worship of the church, the kind of righteous lives the members should live, and what the Lord wants His church to be. The particular work of the church is to preach the gospel of Christ that men might become obedient believers in Christ and go to heaven.

Although there soon came a great falling away, or departure from the faith, after the church was established, as predicted by inspiration (2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 Tim. 4: 1-3), which resulted in many religious errors and doctrines of men and human organizations. It is still our purpose to remain true to the divine pattern and be the true church of Christ, contending "for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

As we observe the teachings and practices of many religious bodies today, we can clearly see the difference in the one true church that Jesus built and the human denominational churches. The greater number of these were built several centuries after Christ built His church. They are not close to being

like Christ's church. All the different denominations do not make up the Lord's church.

Many religious bodies exist today, but they were not established by Christ. Human beings established them. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That is the "rock" upon which the Lord's church is built. Therefore, no one ever spoke by divine authority like Christ and said, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16: 18). Of course, every man has a right to his belief, but that does not make his belief right (Prov. 14:22).

THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Concerning true worship in this Christian Age, Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

In the Lord's church the worship is composed of five elements:

1. Preaching/teaching God's Word;
2. Giving of money to help support the Lord's work;
3. Singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs;
4. Observing the Lord's Supper each first day of the week; and
5. Prayers unto God (cf. Acts 2:42; Col. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Acts 20:7; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Acts 16:25; 1 Thess. 5:17-18).

Mechanical instruments of music in worship are not authorized in the Lord's Word. They are an addition (2 John 9-11).

As we carefully study the New Testament, make careful note of the identifying marks of Christ's church, and compare them with the teachings and practices of present-day denominational religions, we can see clearly the difference in the church Christ built and human organizations. They are not even close to being like Christ's church. They have doctrines and practices that are not in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. They are

systems of religious error (Matt. 15:3-9; Mark 7:1-13) and not the Lord's true church. If we worship "in truth," we will worship according to God's Word, which is truth (John 17:17; Col. 3:17). Many men do not speak that way today regarding true worship.

SALVATION FROM SIN

Never man spake like Christ in announcing to the world man's conditions to obey for salvation from sin, or pardon, by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8). Jesus said to His apostles, in what we call the Great Commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15-16).

Christ first built His church on the day of Pentecost. When believers asked Peter, "What shall we do?" His response was: "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" (Acts 2:37-38). On that day, he spoke of Christ being Divine and having been raised from the dead. Those who received his words were baptized and added by the Lord to the church on that very same day. In this way, people are cleansed by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). The penitent Saul of Tarsus was told by Ananias to "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16).

If one looks at all the accounts of people being converted, as described in the book of Acts, every occurrence details adults learning of Christ and obeying Him. In Acts 8, we have a clear example of one who was taught concerning Christ and who deserved to obey the Lord and be saved, confessing his faith in Christ as the Son of God (cf. Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9; 1 Tim. 6:12), and then being immersed in water (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). After that, he went on his way "rejoicing" (Acts 8:26-39). There is never any mention of an infant being baptized. The Bible teaches that infants are born without sin (Ezek. 18:20; Matt. 18:3; 19:14).

The Lord's plan of salvation is not taught in many denominational bodies. Two expressions are usually given to

express conversion in denominations, and their application of these terms is in error:

1. "Pray the sinner's prayer" and
2. "Do you know Jesus?"

Neither Christ nor His apostles ever talked this way to alien sinners to receive the forgiveness of their sins. Sure, it is imperative that we know Christ as He is the means through which heaven can be our home. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The author of the book of Hebrews wrote that Christ is "the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9).

Christ closed His Sermon on the Mount by stressing that to be a wise builder a person must do His will (Matt. 7:21-27). Yet, often the false teachers that stress one must "know Jesus" or "have a right relationship with Christ" do not teach what the Bible teaches on knowing Jesus, and being saved, and having a right relationship with Him.

The beloved apostle John wrote: "And hereby we do know that we know him, **if we keep his commandments**. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, **is a liar**, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected" (1 John 2:3-5, emp. added, PBC). So, our relationship with Jesus depends upon our obedience to His word. Jesus also said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15); "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). This is the right way to "know Jesus" and to have a "right relationship with Christ." It is not some emotional "better felt than told" experience.

Too, sprinkling or pouring a little water on the head of a person is not Scriptural baptism. Baptism is a burial in water and a resurrection therefrom (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12); and the purpose of baptism is to obtain the forgiveness of sins by the grace of God (Acts 2:38; Eph. 2:8).

ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST

No man spake as did Christ in stating the importance of obeying Him to have the spiritual blessings of God. Jesus once stated, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).²

God's Spirit quickens or gives life to the spirit of man through the word (Eph. 2:1-9), and the words of the Bible are the words of the Spirit. The words of Jesus are the teachings of the Spirit; they give life to those who receive and obey the words. They are spiritual words.

Jesus, in explaining the Parable of the Soils, said that "the word of God" is the "seed" of the kingdom (Luke 8:11). In the seed is the life principle. God created it that way (Gen. 1:11-12). Hence, James wrote of Christians: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (Jas. 1:18). He also said that the Word of God "is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). The words of Christ, or the teachings of Christ, are found in the New Testament, given to us by inspired men as writers (1 Cor. 2:4-13). Peter once said to Christ, "Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John. 6:68), meaning, of course, that the teaching will bring eternal life to all those who obey it. Later, he wrote to Christians: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23). Hence, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit operates on the heart of man through, or by the means of, the inspired word of truth and not in some direct, mysterious, or miraculous way. Paul clearly stated that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1: 16). Moreover, no other words will produce conversion. The psalmist declared, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psa. 19:7), and Paul wrote that "all spiritual blessings" are "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3), and that we are "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4).

Almost all religionists admit that an influence is exerted by the Holy Spirit in one's conversion to Christ, or his new birth; but the important question is, "How is this influence exerted? Is it

direct or indirect?" The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person of the Godhead (Matt. 28:19) and that He uses the Word of God as an instrument to convict of sin (Rom. 3:20), and to lead, guide, and direct the child of God to heaven. On the day of Pentecost, the people were "pricked" in their hearts (Acts 2:37), but it was by the words spoken by the apostle Peter that did it. The Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). So, as believers, they were told to "Repent, and be baptized...for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), and when they did this, they were saved and added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47).

When the apostle Paul went to the wicked city of Corinth and preached the Gospel, many of the Corinthians, "hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Later, he wrote to them a letter and said, "I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). We know that when an act is said to have been performed by a person and by a certain instrument, it is clearly understood that the person did the act but used the instrument as a means (cf. Psalms 119:50, 93). David also declared: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105); "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalms 73:24). Hence, the power by which the Lord saves is His Gospel; this message is the only hope for salvation. The Bible does not mention any additional power of God unto salvation. It does not teach that God must send something direct, in addition to the Word, upon the heart of man for his salvation. Man must hear the Gospel, believe it, and obey it. So, Jesus said, "The **words** that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63, emphasis added, PBC).

The Word of God is eternal; it shall never pass away (Matt. 24:35; 1 Peter 1:24-25). The Word contains "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). The Bible is an all-sufficient guide to man in all of his religious duties; by it he is "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is the inspired, final, complete and perfect revelation to man and is man's only inerrant guide in all spiritual matters.

At the final day of reckoning, all people will be judged by the Word of the Lord. Jesus also said, "He that rejected me, and

receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Sadly, some are claiming, in addition to the Word, special revelations from the Lord. Thus, the New Testament documents have been supplemented. Sue, Harry, Dick, and Tom now join Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: And some are carried away with their religious errors (cf. Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim. 4:1-4). But we are not to follow such deceptions (Gal. 1:6-9). If some new teaching adds to or takes away from what the Bible says, it is a lie.

Many people today are being told a lie about Christ being Divine and the only Begotten Son of God and that man must obey the Savior to go to heaven, just as Eve was told a lie by the devil at the beginning of man's history on the earth. Satan said to Eve that if she ate of the fruit of this particular tree, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Eve believed Satan's lie (Gen. 3:6). She ate and Adam did eat. Thus, they sinned and were driven out of the beautiful Garden of Eden, and physical death came upon all mankind (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22). But we are guilty of our own sins (Isa. 59:1-2).

"I AM THE RESURRECTION"

Finally, to conclude our study on the words of Christ that no man has ever spoken, we note the language of Christ to Martha after the death and burial of her brother, Lazarus. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

After speaking with Martha, Jesus soon, with Mary, her sister, and others, went to the tomb nearby where Lazarus was buried. There Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth" (John 11:43-44). The miracle was instantaneous. No mere man could have done this; only a Divine Being could have brought the dead back to life.

By Christ saying, "I am the resurrection," He meant that He was the cause or source of the resurrection, that He had the

power to affect it. And He meant that He had the power to do it at this time as well as at the last day. Jesus had already stated once in His ministry: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

The Scriptures teach that physical death is the separation of the soul, or spirit, from the body (Gen. 35:18; Eccl. 12:7; Jas. 2:26). But even though a person may die physically, he shall hereafter live. There will be a resurrection of the body for all mankind; there will be victory over death. But only one, the Lord Jesus Christ, has the credentials to say, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE." Job, in the long ago, asked the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). The Lord's answer to that question is YES! Jesus gave the hope for our soul (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-2), and we rejoice in the fact we will be victorious at last.

When the final day of the resurrection comes, then we can fully understand Paul's language:

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption,
and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be
brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is
swallowed up in victory."

"O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?"

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is
the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the
victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-
57 NKJV).

The apostle Paul, who was convinced of the Divinity of Christ, wrote at the end of his life, "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).

When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, Christ said to him, "Blessed art thou..." (Matt. 16:17). Still blessed is that man who can confess, "Thou art the Son of God," and obey Him. But the child of God must hold out faithful to the end of life's journey: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10:22; cf. Rev. 2:10). We must remember:

The gray-haired saint may fall at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove;
Death only binds us fast
To that bright shore of love.

CONCLUSION

As to Christ, therefore, "Never man spake like this man." No prophet or priest has spoken such truths with as much power, grace, beauty, and simplicity as Jesus. It should be our desire to sit at the feet of our Lord, as did Mary in the long ago, and listen to His words of life eternal. When Jesus closed His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records that "the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). Let us, therefore, heed the admonition that Paul gave: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16). Christ is worthy of our discipleship.

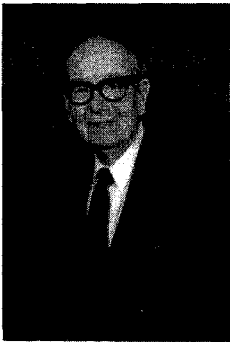
ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (AD. 1611) unless otherwise noted.
2. The Living Oracles reads as follows: "It is the Spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing. The words which I speak unto you, are spirit and are life." Scholars are not agreed if this word **spirit**, as in the King James Version, should be with a capital "S" or remain with a small "s." The ASV (1901) used the small "s," but the NASB used the capital "S," meaning the Holy Spirit. The NKJV, which is becoming very popular, also uses the capital "s" and so does the Living Oracles translation. MacKnight, Goodspeed, Weymouth, and Moffat all use the capital "S," as do other translations. Personally, this speaker prefers the capital "S," making it refer to the Holy Spirit. But the RSV used the small "s," and so did McCord.

STEWARDSHIP: THE WIDOW'S MITE

MARK 12:42; LUKE 21:2

V. P. BLACK



V. P. Black was born into an Alabama family of ten boys; four became preachers. He is a graduate of FHU, Faulkner, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He has served on the boards of Faulkner University and the Namwianga Christian School in Zambia, Africa. Brother Black has authored several study books on stewardship, *My God and My Money* being the best known. More than 400,000 of his books have been studied in churches of Christ.

There has always been a relationship between man, his money, and God. This is a relationship that no one can escape. Man giving to God goes back to the days of Cain and Abel. If all Christians could understand why God wants them to contribute of their material possessions, surely they would be more liberal in their giving.

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called *unto him* his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all *they* did cast in of their abundance;

but she of her want did cast in all that she had,
even all her living (Mark 12:41-44) (KJV).

To understand the teaching of Jesus concerning the widow's mite, we need to examine the context with special emphasis on verse 40. These are the final words of Mark's record spoken by Jesus in the temple. Jesus condemned the scribes because of their preoccupation with the mere appearance of godliness. The extent of their faith runs no deeper than their religious display of flowing robes, respected greetings, and seats of honor at their banquets. But Jesus singles out the nature of their hypocrisy: the devouring of the houses of widows and trying to cover their sins with superficial piety and long prayers.

We do not know exactly how they were devouring the houses of widows. There have been many different thoughts and ideas concerning verse 40. Some believe that the scribes encouraged the widows to make gifts beyond their means. Some believe that this practice referred to the scribes' mismanagement of the property of widows who had dedicated themselves to the service of the temple. Still others believe that the devouring of the houses of widows referred to the scribes' habit of sponging on the widows. We may never know all about it, but we do know that devouring of the widows' houses was a serious breach of trust and a terrible sin. How different she was from the wealthy, who gave only from their surplus and never felt the pinch of self denial.

When the people heard what Jesus said, they must have thought about what he had taught them. "And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). In the Old Testament, widows were among the most vulnerable and dependent class of people in the land. Because they were so dependent and vulnerable, God gave them a unique protection under the Law of Moses. "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless" (Exod. 22:22-24).

It is interesting to observe that Jesus did not complement the poor widow, nor did He condemn her. He did not say that he loved her as he said to the rich young ruler. Jesus did not tell others to go and do what this widow had done. But Jesus was teaching his disciples that the true meaning of giving is not only how much we give, but also how much we have left behind. The spirit in which one gives is very important, and one's giving should correspond with one's wealth.

For a gift to be valuable in the sight of God, it is not determined solely by what one gives. The motive, attitude, and the financial condition of the giver are to be taken into consideration. We learn from the poor widow that the grace of giving is not to be neglected because of poverty. Her example of giving should inspire Christians to give more. I do not know if she gave all of her income or all of her possessions, but I do know that she set an example that is immortal. It is not the portion but the proportion of our giving about which God is concerned. There were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests around the wall of the court of women, and here the people would drop in their offerings. The widow does not represent the least we should give, but the most we should give. When we sing that song, "Take my silver and my gold not a mite will I withhold," we are telling God that everything we have belongs to Him. There are few members who are willing to give up a little pleasure that the gospel may be preached. Reading about the widow's mite should make most of us ashamed of the way we give.

The rich gave of their abundance and would hardly miss what they gave. It did not alter their standard of living. It did not cause them to miss a meal. The widow did not hide behind some excuse such as, "I do not have a lot to give, so I will keep what I have and the temple will not miss it" or, "The scribes, Pharisees, and the priest are a corrupt group, they don't deserve my support." Neither did she say, "There is too much politics and not enough justice being done," or "If I give what I have, what will happen to me?" She did not talk like this because she loved God and was sincere in her giving.

In an effort to avoid liberal giving, some have contended that we are no longer under the Law of Moses, and in this age, we are not required to give a tenth. Such reasoning shows ingratitude and a failure to understand the full import of Christianity. Why would a Christian who has been wonderfully blessed want to give less than the Jew who lived under an inferior law? Can you conceive of a person, during the first century, being baptized into Christ and coming up out of the water shouting, "Hallelujah, now I don't have to give a tenth?"

The love of money is a dangerous thing. Members must be shocked into the realization that there are things in life more important than silver and gold. It was the love of money that motivated Lot to choose the plain of Jordan where there was plenty of water and grass for his cattle. It was the love of money that motivated Gehazi to lie to Elisha. It was the love of money that motivated Achan to steal gold, silver, and the Babylonian garment. It was the love of money that motivated Ananias and Sapphira to lie about their giving. It was the love of money that made the rich young ruler turn and walk away from Jesus. Think what a terrible price these people paid for being possessed by the love for money.

There is a great contrast in the giving of the poor widow and that of Ananias and Sapphira.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And 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. But 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? Whiles 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. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things (Acts 5:1-5).

Money had become the master of Ananias and Sapphira, and when money becomes the master, the person becomes a slave to a merciless tyrant. Every person should ask himself the question, "Do I control my money, or does my money control me?" Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Money can control a person's attitude, his disposition, and his outlook on life. Money is one of the most powerful things in the world.

Money is deceitful. "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). Money can deceive one into believing that he is a liberal giver when in reality he is a very poor giver. One may make one thousand dollars per week and only give fifty dollars per week. This person is not a liberal giver – no, no. One of the greatest temptations in life is for a person to fall in love with money, which is one of the most dangerous things in life.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Tim. 6:6-11).

We should be thankful for all the material blessings that God has bestowed upon us and pray for a heart big enough to use them to the glory of God. We learn from studying the widow's mite that God's people are expected to be liberal givers. The widow's mite was more in the sight of God than the rich man's gold. This is

true because the rich man gave out of his abundance, the loss of which he did not feel. The giving of the rich did not involve a sacrifice, but the widow gave all she had, which was truly a sacrifice. I have often thought that when this event took place, those present must have been talking like this: "Two mites are of little importance to the treasury. If she had given one and kept the other, it would have shown good judgment. She should remember that charity begins at home." It must have been a shock to the rich to hear Jesus say that the poor widow had cast more in that all they that cast into the treasury.

The giving of the poor widow reminds us of what took place in the house of Simon.

Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this (John 12:1-7).

The fact that this occasion is told by Matthew, Mark, and John shows how deep the impression must have made upon the mind of those who were followers of Jesus. Mary had many reasons for showing or expressing her love for Jesus. She was indebted to Him for the many great lessons He had taught her. She was indebted to Him for raising her brother from the dead. Mary did not give Him a common gift that cost her very little but a precious gift that was very expensive. Judas objected to the gift of

love, but it was welcomed by Jesus because it was an act of kindness and a tribute of genuine love. What could be more noble than to anoint the feet of Him who was both God and man? Who would not be happy to be permitted to touch the feet of Jesus and to kiss them? It would have seem most probable that Mary first wiped the feet of Jesus, wetting them with her tears, then wiping off the dust and anointing them. She broke the box and poured the whole content on His head.

The Bible teaches that we are to be givers. The treasury, for many years, was a witness of what God expected of his people. It was a recognition of His claims on both the rich and the poor. God is our creator and preserver. If everyday we live and everything we have is a gift, we must honor Him with our substance and the firstfruits of our increase. There is a little graveyard next to a small church building in a small community in England. There was a poor lady who was always making sacrifices to give to the Lord's work. After this poor lady died, there was an epitaph on her tombstone that said, "She hath done what she couldn't." This is what the poor widow did, so she steps out of the shadow into the light of history.

Christ did not commend the poor widow because of the value of the gift; for two mites were a smaller sum than we could give if we gave our smallest coin. It was approved because it was the offering of a heart full of love for God. It was the love of God that motivated her to give, and it is the love of God that motivates us to give liberally. It was love that motivated God to give His son to die on the cross that we might be saved.

It was the love for God that motivated Abraham to offer his son upon the altar, but God did not want Isaac – God wanted Abraham. It was the love for God that motivated Jacob to make what many have called a rash vow.

And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put *for* his pillows, and set it up *for* a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city *was called* Luz at the first. And

Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set *for* a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee (Gen. 28:18-22).

Notice the things that Jacob asked for in his prayer. He asked for divine companionship: "If God will be with me." He asked for divine protection: "and keep me in the way I go." He asked for sustenance: "and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on." He asked for divine favour: "So that I come to my Father's house in peace then Jehovah shall be my God." When Jacob made this vow, he was just as poor as the widow. Jacob kept this vow and became a very rich man.

The giving of the brethren in Macedonia reminds us of the poor widow.

Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to *their* power, I bear record, yea, and beyond *their* power *they were* willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us* the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And *this they did*, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God (2 Cor. 8:1-5).

Paul tells the Corinthians how extremely liberal the Macedonians were to stir them up in their giving. Paul tells of the great affliction that the brethren in Macedonia were enduring. I believe these brethren in Macedonia were as poverty-stricken as the brethren in Judea, yet they prayed that they might have a part in the good work. Chrysostom taught that they were not simply

afflicted, but that they were afflicted in a way that would draw them closer to Christ through their affliction. These Macedonians were giving to God that which belonged to God in the first place. "But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 29:14). For our giving to be acceptable, we must first give ourselves to God. We must make a complete surrender to God.

The Lord spoke to Elijah and said,

Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah (1 Kings 17:9-16).

What an honor to entertain the man at whose word the clouds are sealed and refuse to send rain upon the earth, and at whose word the windows are opened and sends rain upon the earth. Elijah was the man who could pray and bring down fire from heaven upon the sacrifice at Mt. Carmel; the one who appeared with Jesus at the mount of transfiguration. She went and did according to the sayings of Elijah. Oh, what faith she manifested. The famine was so severe that it was a common thing for one to die of starvation. As a result of her kindness to Elijah, she was wonderfully blessed. For thirty months, every time she would go to the barrel there was meal for her and her son.

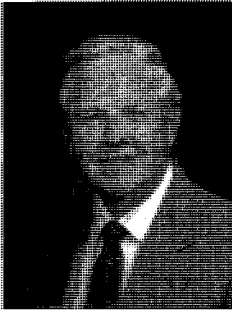
What do we learn from the study of the poor widow?

1. We learn that the Lord observes our giving. The elders may not see what we give, and the preacher may not see what we give, but the Lord *does* see and observes everything we do. We cannot hide from God.
2. The Lord evaluates our giving. He evaluated the giving of Cain and Abel. He evaluated the giving of the Jews in the days of Malachi. For our giving to be acceptable to God, it must be sincere, willing, cheerful, and liberal.
3. The Lord responds to our giving by being pleased or displeased. He either accepts our giving or rejects it. Liberal givers are blessed in so many ways. 1 Corinthians 9 is a short chapter of fifteen verses. In these few verses, Paul tells of eight different ways God blesses one for liberal giving.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – LESSON 1

MATTHEW 5-7

CLARENCE DELOACH



Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson County, TN, in 1936. He and Eddie (Lowe) are the parents of four and grandparents of seven. Fifty years of preaching were celebrated in Aug. '01. He graduated from FHC and DLC and has conducted over 400 gospel meetings. He has 33 years of radio preaching and 15 years of TV preaching. He has conducted campaigns in South America and Europe, has authored three books and produced two video series. He retired as pulpit minister for Walnut Street church in Dickson and serves on the Advisory Boards of FHU and the American Heart Association. He is Lieutenant Governor of the Kiwanis Clubs in Middle TN.

AN INTRODUCTION

No study of the Master Teacher would be complete without a careful look at the Master's "Sermon on the Mount." The pulpit for this greatest sermon ever preached was a mountain. Interestingly, mountains played prominently in the great events connected with God's plan through the ages. The human race survived on a mountain; Abraham offered his son of promise on a mountain; the law was given to Israel from a mountain; Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal took place on a mountain; Jesus ascended from a mountain.

As far as we know, this mountain – really a large hill – had no name until Jesus preached there. It was one of the many hills or slopes that surrounded the sea of Galilee. What was merely a

mountain became The Mountain because of what Jesus said there. Traditionally, since that time, it has been called the Mount of Beatitudes.

A PORTRAIT OF THE TEACHER-PREACHER

Matthew states, “From that time Jesus began to preach....” (Matt. 4:17). Preaching was a central focus of Jesus’ ministry and remains a central part of the mission of the church. Preaching is important to God (1 Cor. 1:21). Preaching was and is important to Jesus. Preaching was important to the apostles and those who lived in the shadow of the cross. Preaching must remain important to us today.

The word “preach” (*kerruso*) means to publish or proclaim, to make known a message. The manner and message of Jesus’ preaching made a profound impression upon those who heard him. Matthew reports at the end of the sermon that “the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:28,29). The scribes were the professionals who quoted from others to lend support to what they said, but Jesus quoted only God’s word as final authority on truth. Jesus not only spoke the truth, which He said can be known and will “make you free,” but He was the truth, an affirmation of His deity and sovereignty (John 8:32; 14:6; 17:17).

Jesus preached with authority, as gospel preachers can today when the message is saturated with the Word. When Paul charged Titus to fulfill his ministry at Crete, he said, “Speak these things, [i.e. gospel truth], exhort and rebuke with all authority” (Titus 2:15). God’s preacher today can preach with authority when he preaches biblical truth. Jesus preached with certainty, not question marks!

He preached to people, “and seeing the multitudes... He opened his mouth and taught them, saying...”(Matt. 5:1, 2). Our Lord’s message existed, not for itself, but for people. Jesus’

ministry was people-oriented; He had compassion on the multitudes. All kinds of people: the sick and hungry; the rich and poor; the distressed and downcast; the emotionally stable and unstable; the oppressed and powerful; the influential and the nobodies, the ignorant and enlightened. He had one message that all needed. The common people heard him gladly because He made them feel loved and valuable to God.

Every gospel preacher would do well to saturate his soul in the symmetry and balance of the Master's message. That beauty and balance made such an impression upon John that he wrote, "We beheld his glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

THE SERMON

Matthew's narrative is an emphasis upon the King and His kingdom. The sermon's focus is upon the principles of kingdom living. The sermon has been called "The Manifesto of the King," the "Constitution of the Kingdom," and the "Magna Charta of the Church." While the sermon is not given a formal theme, it is evident that it deals with the Principles of the Kingdom.

The sermon is a model for all gospel preachers.

1. It is a model of homiletical form. The introduction called "the Beatitudes," is taken from the Greek word *makarios* which means happy, fortunate, or blessed. What an attention-getter! The living of the principles of the king will bring real true blessedness in the life of the practitioner.

From His introduction, Jesus proceeded in His first point to speak of the life and influence of the citizens; the second point addresses the nature of real righteousness; the third point is an exhortation to enter the Kingdom, while the conclusion speaks to the effect of the sermon on the hearers.

The impact of Kingdom living is illustrated by salt and light. The “righteousness that exceeds” is then applied to worship, with right motives given for giving, praying, and fasting. Real righteousness is the key to proper conduct in moral and ethical conduct. To claim to follow the spirit without obeying the letter is to be a liar; to follow the letter without following the spirit is to be a hypocrite. To follow the spirit in the right attitude and the letter in the right action is to be a faithful, loyal citizen of the King.

2. The sermon is a model of simplicity. Jesus preached to be understood. His words were clear, direct, yet emphatic. He used the vernacular of the common people. He used illustrations with which the people were familiar: salt and light; lamps and baskets; beams and closets; moth and rust; sowing and reaping; birds and lilies; specks and planks; dogs, pearls and swine; bread and stones; sheep and wolves; grapes and thorns; trees and fruit; sand and rock; winds and storms; rain and floods.

All these were familiar things. Jesus never got over the heads of his hearers. The model prayer in chapter six is direct and comprehensive. In sixty-six words, with few syllables, He comprehended words of praise, adoration and petition. A model for His disciples, not a ritualistic prayer to be cited. It is a model of devotion, reverence, loyalty, submission, dependence, penitence, humility, triumph, exultation and hope – all the ingredients of acceptable prayer by Kingdom citizens.

3. It is a model in balance. Luke was so impressed by the Master’s balance of life and lip, that he spoke of all that Jesus “did and taught” (Acts 1:1). The sermon begins with “being” (attitudes of being) and ends with “doing” (Matt. 5:1-12; 7:24-27). This balance is the key to our relationship with God and our motivation for service. When we rush into doing without being, we will soon burn out the power of the flesh. Unless there is in us that which is above us, we will soon succumb to that which is about us. The principles of the King’s reign must be internalized before they can affect us externally.

4. It is a model in dealing with the false and the counterfeit. If there is truth, there will be error. The truth-teacher has his counterpart in the false-teacher. Jesus did not preach to please the masses. His sermon does not appeal to the culture of tolerance. He spoke of the narrow gate and the broad way. He described two ways, two gates, and two destinations. He spoke of two trees and two fruits. The sermon cuts across easy-believism, cheap grace, and tolerance. The sermon calls for choice between true righteousness and human righteousness, between divine truth and human tradition, and between trusting God and trusting self.

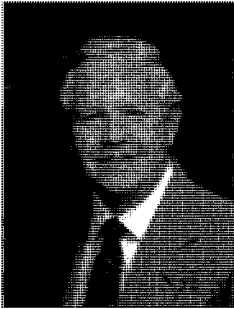
Jesus said there would be “false teachers” and gave the criteria for recognizing them, i.e., by their fruits. It is a solemn warning, “Beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15-20). If ever a generation needs the warning, it is ours. Satan is not opposed to religion, he exploits and manipulates it to his advantage. He is opposed to Biblical Christianity. Satan has used two approaches to destroy the church. He tried persecution, but found that true faith flourished under adversity. He discovered a better approach: infiltration. He is a master of deception and camouflage. He loves to blend in and wear a mask, “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” Jesus clearly defined false prophets and spoke of the fleece they wear, the fruit they bear, and the fate they share.

CONCLUSION

What a sermon! What a teacher! It shows the absolute necessity for the new birth, because its standards are too high and demanding to be met by human resources. It drives men to Jesus as our only hope. It gives God’s pattern for happiness and true fulfillment. It is the greatest resource for reaching others for Christ.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – LESSON 2

CLARENCE DELOACH



Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson County, TN, in 1936. He and Eddie (Lowe) are the parents of four and grandparents of seven. Fifty years of preaching were celebrated in Aug. '01. He graduated from FHC and DLC and has conducted over 400 gospel meetings. He has 33 years of radio preaching and 15 years of TV preaching. He has conducted campaigns in South America and Europe, has authored three books and produced two video series. He retired as pulpit minister for Walnut Street church in Dickson and serves on the Advisory Boards of FHU and the American Heart Association. He is Lieutenant Governor of the Kiwanis Clubs in Middle TN.

INTRODUCTION

The sermon on the Mount overwhelms me. Three lectures, at best, can only touch the hem of the garment. After all, this sermon is the greatest statement ever made on moral, spiritual, and ethical teaching. It is the foundation of everything Jesus taught.

The emphasis in Chapter 7 is upon doing. It is important to hear, but the doing is much more difficult. "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" (Matt. 7:21). The appeal of Jesus is for an authentic transformation of our lives by the word of God. The sermon is not one to be praised, but one to be practiced. It is not to be heard and discussed, but one to be believed and put into life. It is a call to action!

Chapter 7 is a call to decision. It presents the King's way of salvation. It is the holy highway. The old straight and narrow.

The text we study today is a familiar one, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13,14).

Here, Jesus describes the highway that Isaiah announced in prophecy, "A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray" (Isa. 35:8). It is the King's highway, the way of holiness, the old S and N. It is the way that leads to life.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

As we explore this text from the Master Teacher, three great facts emerge.

THERE IS A DECISION TO FACE

"Enter in," Jesus said. It is up to you; there is a decision to make. This statement counters the idea that the sermon is just a discourse on ethics. This statement calls for a tough choice. In the chapter, He talks about two ways-the broad and the narrow; two kinds of trees-the good and the bad; two kinds of builders-the wise and the foolish; two kinds of prophets-the false and the true.

Man must choose! The call for choice is not new. Moses said to Israel, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30:19). Joshua challenged the new residents of Canaan with a choice, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"

(Josh. 24:15). Elijah called for a decision, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). Through Jeremiah, the Lord said to Judah, “Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death” (Jer. 21:8).

There is a choice to make! Modern man hates this! In our culture of tolerance, people get uptight when you tell them there is one way to heaven. They like to think that everybody is OK. God is too good to allow anybody to be lost! Man tends to divide people into upper, middle, and lower class, rich and poor, the elite and the ordinary, the powerful and the peasant, the beautiful and ugly. But, God does not! He divides men into sheep and goats, the right and left, the saved and lost.

According to Jesus, one is either on the holy highway or on the broad way. Many say, “Don’t be so narrow-minded!” “Don’t you know we are all headed to the same place?” Where did we get that idea? Not from Jesus! Not from the Bible! Listen to Jesus, “I am **the way, the truth, and the life**. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Jesus, in the words, “Enter in” is saying that man has a decision to face. Concerning that decision:

1. You have the **freedom to decide**. You can choose and you must choose. We are not machines, or robots, but human beings with volition.
2. You are **forced to decide**. When you decide not to enter, that is a decision. You cannot be neutral with regard to Jesus (Matt. 12:30).
3. There is the **fruit of decision**. You are free to choose, but you are not free to choose the consequences of your choice.

THERE IS A DIRECTION TO FOLLOW

After the decision, there comes the direction. "Enter in at the straight gate [that is the decision] for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be that go in thereat because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are who find it" (AV).

The narrow way is the way every redeemed soul in Jesus Christ is walking. It is the King's Highway, the holy highway that leads to life.

1. It is a **disciplined way**. When the Authorized Version says "straight," it does not mean a straight line, but a difficult, rigorous and disciplined way. There is no cheap, easy way to follow Jesus. Paul charged Timothy to "endure hardship as a good soldier for Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). Even many Christians have bought into a kind of "cheap-grace," a "feel good" brand for Christianity.
2. It is a **different way**. Jesus said few would find it. While salvation has been made available to all, you will not find the masses, the crowds, on this road. We have a culture that says morality is determined by the majority. Many take comfort in saying "Well, I'm like everyone else." But the holy highway is different. It begins at a different source; it follows a different course; and it ends with a different conclusion. And if you are on the King's highway, you will be going against the tide most of the time.
3. It is a **delightful way**. The prophet Isaiah, in describing the holy highway said, "But the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:9,10). While disciplined and difficult, it is also delightful. It is a

simple, clear, certain, confident and cheerful way. The joy of the Lord is their strength. That joy is independent of circumstances and is there in the midst of adversity.

THERE IS A DESTINY TO FIND

Every highway is going somewhere. We need to ask, When I get to where I am headed, where will I be? Our Lord said there are only two destinations: one is life, the other is destruction. Decision determines direction, and direction determines destiny.

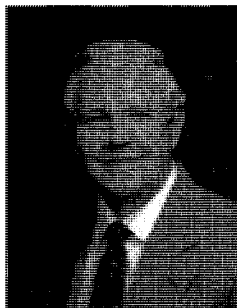
Destruction in the Bible is not a good destination. Hell is real, regardless of what modern theologians think.

CONCLUSION

The most important thing in our lives is to end our journey on the King's highway to life. Jesus said there is a decision to face, a direction to follow, and a destiny to find.

THE MASTER ON PRAYER – LESSON 3

CLARENCE DELOACH



Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson County, TN, in 1936. He and Eddie (Lowe) are the parents of four and grandparents of seven. Fifty years of preaching were celebrated in Aug. '01. He graduated from FHC and DLC and has conducted over 400 gospel meetings. He has 33 years of radio preaching and 15 years of TV preaching. He has conducted campaigns in South America and Europe, has authored three books and produced two video series. He retired as pulpit minister for Walnut Street church in Dickson and serves on the Advisory Boards of FHU and the American Heart Association. He is Lieutenant Governor of the Kiwanis Clubs in Middle TN.

Jesus' ministry was short, only three years, yet in those years He spent much time in prayer. He often arose before daybreak to commune with His father. In the evening, He would resort to a quiet place to pray. Most of His praying was private (Matt. 6:9-15).

The first Christians were marked by prayer (Acts 2:42; Acts 4:24; 12:12). In a general way, the Bible has much to say on prayer, while revealing many of the prayers of God's servants. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Nehemiah, and Elijah all prayed. It makes a great difference; James said it is effective (James 5:16).

Since the Sermon on the Mount deals with the principles of Kingdom living, we would expect the King to teach on the manner and importance of prayer. In Chapter 6: 1-8, Jesus taught how not to pray. It is not the length or language that matters. Prayer is not

to impress God, nor is it to inform God, but it is to invite God into our lives and enjoy fellowship with Him.

THE MODEL PRAYER

In the paragraph we study now, Jesus gives a brief, yet comprehensive outline of what prayer should be. In less than seventy words, Jesus compressed every element of true prayer. This prayer has two sections; the first deals with God's glory and the second with man's needs. Each section has three petitions. The first are petitions on behalf of God's glory, His Kingdom, and His will. The second are petitions for daily bread, forgiveness, and protection.

The emphasis of Jesus is that prayer glorifies God. It is an opportunity for God to manifest his goodness. The focus of prayer is God's glory, not man's need.

It is significant that Jesus makes no mention of a **place**, so citizens of the Kingdom can pray anywhere (1 Tim. 2:8). No mention is made of **time**, so pray anytime, any place. Any posture, any time, any place, under any circumstances – prayer is appropriate.

The model prayer was not meant to be repeated as a citation, for Jesus said, "After this manner, pray." Jesus had already warned about praying with meaningless repetition.

ATTITUDE IN PRAYER

The attitude of "Father" reflects family devotion. The word "hallowed" suggests reverence. "Your Kingdom come" speaks of loyalty. "Your will be done" indicates submission. "Give us this day, our daily bread" denotes dependence. "Forgive us our debts" implies penitence. "Lead us not into temptation" talks of humility. "Yours is the Kingdom" denotes triumph; "And the glory" exultation; "forever" hope.

THE CONTENT OF PRAYER

Every part centers on God.

1. HIS PATERNITY. "Our Father who is in heaven." What does it mean to approach God as our Father? It means the end of fear. It settles all uncertainties and gives hope (Matt. 7:11; John 10:29; 14:21). It answers the problem of loneliness. When others forsake, His promise is, "I'll never leave you or forsake you." It settles the matter of selfishness, for He is "Our Father." We are fellow-believers. God is the father of all. It settles the matter of resources, for heaven and earth is His. All spiritual resources are available to those who trust Him (Eph. 1:3).
2. HIS PRIORITY. "Hallowed be your name." God's name represents all that He is: His character, His sovereignty, His purpose, and His will. It is because of His holy character that we trust Him (Ex. 34:5-7). To hallow His name is to attribute to God the holiness that is His, and to revere, honor, glorify, and obey Him. His name is hallowed most when we live in conformity to His will (Psa. 34:3).
3. HIS PROGRAM. "Your Kingdom come." Our greatest desire should be to see the glory and reign of the King coming to the hearts and lives of men. That is, to see His agenda fulfilled; His gospel proclaimed; souls saved and added to His church; and His Son exalted as "Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings." Too often our prayers are selfish, focused on our needs, our plans and aspirations. The basic idea in this petition is for God's rule and Christ's enthronement to come into people's lives. For the gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to every creature, and for every Christian to respond daily to the dominion and authority of Christ in their hearts and lives.

4. HIS PLAN. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” While God is sovereign, He allows and commands man to exercise his own volition. If man could not choose, God’s commands would be futile and meaningless and His punishments would be cruel and unjust. Praying that God’s will be done is to pray that our wills conform to His. It is to pray in faith, for faith is predicated upon the word of God (Rom. 10:17). It is to pray that His grace will change our lives. It is to pray for ongoing sanctification, a deepening dependency, submission, and obedience to God.
5. HIS PROVISION. “Give us this day our daily bread.” Bread is symbolic of all physical needs. It includes food, health, shelter, family, good government, and peace. God is the source of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Life, health, wealth, possessions, talents, and opportunities do not come by human merit, but heaven’s mercy. It is the height of ingratitude not to recognize His gifts in daily thanksgiving.
6. HIS PARDON. “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” The word “*opheilema*” is one of five Greek words for sin. *Hamartia* is the most common and carries the idea of missing the mark. Other words are rendered trespass, transgression, and lawlessness. The basic idea here is moral and spiritual debt to God, not financial debt. Our greatest debt is sin. It dominates the heart, bringing contamination, misery and guilt. Because sin is our greatest problem, forgiveness is our greatest need. In eight verses, forgiveness is mentioned six times. Christians have been forgiven, justified and redeemed, but our need is ongoing forgiveness. The condition for receiving His forgiveness is that we forgive others.
7. HIS PROTECTION. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” While God’s holiness does not allow His leading anyone into a place where he would be induced to sin (James 1:13), yet, James says that

trials can be good for us (James 1:2,3). So, the plea and prayer is for God to watch over our eyes, our ears, our mouth, our feet, and hands – that He will protect us from sin. It is a safeguard against presumption and a false sense of security. We live in a world cursed by sin and we cannot cope with the evil around us in the power of our own flesh.

8. HIS PREEMINENCE. “For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” What a fitting doxology! A beautiful climax to prayer that centers on God. He is preeminent in His Kingdom, in power and glory (1 Chron. 29:11).

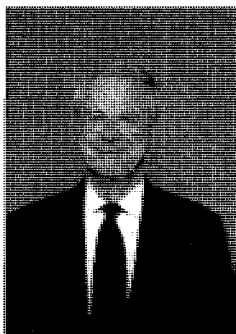
CONCLUSION

There is no substitute for prayer; not eloquence, not intelligence, not energy, not enthusiasm. The reason that so many of us are powerless and ineffective is prayerlessness. There is not a failure that is not a prayer failure, nor a weakness that prayer could not have avoided, or a need that prayer could not have met. Our God is sovereign, so He can answer, but He is sympathetic, so He can hear me.

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS: AN OVERVIEW – LESSON 1

JOHN 6:60

TOM HOLLAND



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Jesus, the Master Teacher and the world's greatest preacher, was the Master Communicator. He could simplify the complex by using language that was easy to be understood. He could observe the ordinary things of life with which people lived and worked, and He could reveal profound truth by "throwing along side of" these simple things of life vital spiritual truth. We call these comparisons "Parables."

A linguistic analysis of the Savior's Sermon on The Mount reveals the power of simple language. Jesus employed simple but powerful words in declaring what has been called "The Constitution of The Kingdom of Heaven." Our Lord was a "Verbal Artist." His conclusion to the Sermon on The Mount paints a verbal picture of two builders. Examine the verbal picture and observe

the way The Lord Jesus filled the "picture" with action words, powerful verbs.

His parables could bring truth to life, and those parables had a unique way of implanting the truth in the hearer's mind. He could answer questions with parables, and the inquirer could immediately see the truth. For example, when the lawyer wanted the identification of "neighbor," (Luke 10:29), Jesus told the story of the "Good Samaritan."

However, The Lord said some things that were hard to be understood. When Jesus was teaching in the Capernaum synagogue the lesson about the "bread that came down from heaven" and declared "he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever," the disciples reacted by saying, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (John 6:58; 6:60).

If Jesus were the Master Teacher and the Greatest Preacher, why did some people find His preaching and teaching hard to be understood and appreciated? This question is pertinent to our day because people now find some of Jesus' teaching "hard." Those who "preach Christ" today may find encouragement to continue while a skeptical world may reject the truth. Those who teach the Lord's word may find strength to continue, even when it seems that they are accomplishing very little. All who preach and teach the Lord's word may be challenged to keep the language simple and easy to be understood.

In this presentation, attention will be given to the following: (1) confused values may cause some to have trouble in accepting the Lord's word; (2) demanding something more than the Lord's word may result in a rejection of His truth; (3) a rejection of the Deity of Christ causes some people to find His word unacceptable, "hard to be understood"; and (4) the right response of the apostles to the Lord's word emphasizes the possibility open to people now.

CONFUSED VALUES

John recorded the miracle of Jesus as He took five loaves of bread and two small fish and multiplied the food so there was

enough to feed five thousand men, "besides the women and children" (John 6:10; Matt. 14:21). The "sign" was so impressive that the people were ready to "come and take Him by force to make Him a king" (John 6:15). However, the people did not understand the nature of the "kingdom of heaven" nor Jesus as the One who would be King of His Kingdom.

Jesus departed from the multitude and came to Capernaum where the seeking multitude found Him the next day. When they found Jesus, they wanted to know why He had come to Capernaum. Jesus said to the people, "You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food that endures to everlasting life" (John 6:26, 27).

The miracle of multiplying the food was a "sign" pointing to Jesus as One who was no mere man. However, the crowd seemed more interested in food that Jesus could provide for the body than "food" He could give for the soul. The physical bread could be enjoyed now; the true "bread of life" involved not just the present but also the eternal. Physical bread can never fully satisfy the basic need of the human soul. The right relationship with the Savior, Jesus the Christ, "the true bread from heaven" (John 6:32), so fully satisfies the fundamental need of man's soul that he/she "shall never hunger" (John 6:35).

People can become so captivated by the present, passing, temporal world or age that they are not interested in hearing and learning the truth as it is in Jesus. Sports, business professions, and educational pursuits may become so important in one's life that he/she is not interested in the "bread of life." Did you ever take a penny, close one eye, then hold the penny near your eye and observe how that penny can block the rays of the sun? In a similar way, the "pennies of life" can become so close to our hearts that they block a true view of the Son of God. People who have little interest in the word of the Lord may find the truth of Jesus hard to be understood because they are not really interested in knowing the truth.

"THE WORD IS NOT ENOUGH"

The disciples who found Jesus teaching about the bread of life "hard to be understood" (John 6:60) were people who wanted a miracle. They said to Jesus, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?" (John 6:30). The people then presented an argument, "Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, gave them bread to eat" (John 6:31).

F.F. Bruce has an interesting observation about this passage. He said:

It might have been thought that the sign they had seen was sufficient attestation of Jesus' claim, but they wanted another. For many, the feeding of the multitude marked him out as the second Moses (verse 14). Let him give further evidence of being the second Moses. If Moses had given the forefathers manna in the wilderness, let the second Moses vindicate his authority in a similar way-not by a once-for-all feeding, but on a more lasting basis.¹

When Jesus was on earth, He verified His true nature and identity by miracles which were signs pointing to the fact that he was more than man (John 20:30, 31). It seems that the miracles were not enough because some religious leaders came to Jesus wanting Him to "show them a sign from heaven" (Matt.16:1).

In this day, it seems that the word of the Lord is not enough. People want to see some "miracle." Some preachers are more than willing to accommodate the demands of the crowd for a "sign" or a "miracle" of healing, tongue speaking, and some even go so far that they will handle deadly snakes.

The Lord's word has been confirmed by those that heard Him. God gave the witnesses of The Lord power to work wonders,

signs, and various miracles in the confirmation of the word of the Lord (Heb. 2:3, 4).

The word translated "confirm" means "to make firm, establish, make secure."² The confirmed word does not need continual confirmation; the word needs to be received and obeyed. So the writer of Hebrews declared: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard..." (Heb. 2:1). Later, the writer admonished: "See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven" (Heb. 12: 25).

A miracle-demanding age needs confidence in the power of the Lord's confirmed word. The Lord's word has the power to make true disciples of Christ (John 8:31). The words of Jesus are the truth that makes men free from the bondage of sin (John 8:31-34). The Lord's word makes known unto honest hearts the way of eternal life (John 6:68). The Lord's word is that by which we one day shall be judged (John 12:48). The word of the Lord is to the "inner man" (2 Cor. 4:16-18) what bread (food) is to the "outward man." The "Bread of Life" satisfies the soul in a way that things of this present cannot and will not fulfill (John 6:35). The word of the Lord satisfies our spiritual needs now and inspires the soul with the hope of life eternal. Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51).

REJECTING THE LORD'S DEITY

It is interesting, but sad, that some people rejected the Lord's word because they did not acknowledge His true identity. The record states: "The Jews then murmured against Him, because he said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven.' And they said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?' How is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven?'"(John 6:41,42).

The rejection of Jesus as the Son of God is widespread today. At least one religious cult has "translated" the Scripture in a way that denies the Deity of Christ. The Jehovah's Witnesses "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures" renders John 1:1 as follows: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Guy N. Woods wrote: "To render the clause, 'And the word was a god,' as some translations do, denies the eternity of the Word and is unscriptural and unscriptural, specious and false."³

Jesus once raised the important question: "What think you about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (Matt. 22:42). The world lets us know what it thinks about Christ. The world has no more respect for Jesus of Nazareth now than the world had when Jesus lived in it in His fleshly body. He was ridiculed, mocked, falsely accused, rejected, and eventually nailed to a cross.

Rejection of the word of Christ is a rejection of the Christ of His word. He declared: "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Efforts to rob Jesus of His Deity have ranged from the meetings of the so-called "Jesus Seminar" to Dan Brown's novel, *"The Da Vinci Code,"* to articles in national magazines such as *"The Jesus Code: America is Rethinking the Messiah--Again"* (cover of U.S. News and World Report, December 22, 2003). Current efforts that deny the Deity of Christ are not new. Second and third century pseudo-gospels attempted the same thing.

In spite of all the historical evidence of the reality of Jesus, there are those who still assert that He was a mythical character. But as Dr. D. David Kennedy stated: "The evidence for Jesus Christ is absolutely overwhelming. No one can disbelieve in Christ because of a lack of evidence."⁴

If people now are led to believe that Jesus was nothing more than a popular religious leader, that will have profound impact on their reception or rejection of His word.

The sayings of Jesus were to some people "hard sayings" because to them He was just a man, not as He proclaimed, "The Son of Man" (John 6:41, 42; 6:27).

Not all people found Jesus' sayings hard. When the multitude began to leave Him, Jesus said to the apostles, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:67). The response of Simon Peter was evidently the response of all of the twelve. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Jesus explained the necessity of His word being internalized by hearers. His explanation was: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

Jesus is not demanding that His disciples become cannibals. He continued by saying, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). When one connects what Peter said, "You have the words of eternal life" with Jesus' statement, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life," then he/she sees that the Lord was in figurative language, emphasizing the necessity of His word becoming a vital part of the inner being.

Woods said: "It seems clear that the references by our Lord to eating and drinking are figurative allusions to the response of men in belief and acceptance of him as the Son of God."⁵

The attitude one has toward the truth of the Lord's word determines how one will react to that word. If one imagines that the Lord's word was given to a special group of religious leaders who would interpret it for everyone else, then even if he attempts to read to understand the Scriptures the false view of those to whom the Lord gave His word will be a hindrance in understanding the word.

Jesus emphasized the importance of the right attitude toward His word. He said: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak of my own authority" (John 7:17). Bruce's comments on this verse are helpful:

As then, so now it is not simply intellectual penetration that will determine truly whether Jesus' claim to impart the Father's teaching is well founded or not; an attitude of heart is also important. If there be a readiness to do the will of God, the capacity for discerning God's message will follow. Whoever has that readiness of heart will recognize in the teaching of Jesus a message which authenticates itself to spiritual perception and conscience of truth.⁶

Why do some find the Lord's word relative to the way to be saved hard to accept, while others, many who are younger, have no trouble at all understanding what to do for the Lord to be their Savior? The answer is in the attitude.

In His parable of the Sower, Jesus explained that the productive seed of the kingdom, the word of God, was sown in the "good and honest heart" (Luke 8:15). If one really wants to know the will of God revealed by His final Spokesperson to the human family (Heb. 1:1, 2), then, according to the promise of Jesus, that person will know it. The right attitude toward the Lord's word means that one will go to that word for the truth. The mind will be free of prejudice. Indifference toward the word will have been rejected. There will be an honesty and sincerity that will keep the mind open and the heart receptive to the Lord's word. The attitude that brings a saving knowledge of the Lord's word will be like the attitude of Samuel who in response to God said, "Speak for Your servant hears." (1 Sam. 3:10).

The sayings or doctrine of Christ may be "hard" to understand and difficult to obey if one is so attached to this present age or world that he/she is preoccupied with recreation,

business, professions, etc., that he/she will not take the time nor put forth the necessary effort to understand the Lord's word.

People who have been taught by so-called "Spirit-guided" preachers to expect miracles today may have trouble accepting the full and final revelation of the Lord's truth recorded in the Bible. The assurances of 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 and 2 Peter 1:3 may fall on deaf ears. Like people of old: "they request a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22).

If people are deceived into believing that Jesus was nothing more than a mere man, a religious leader among religious leaders, or simply a mythical person "invented" by the apostles, then His word of life will not provide life for them.

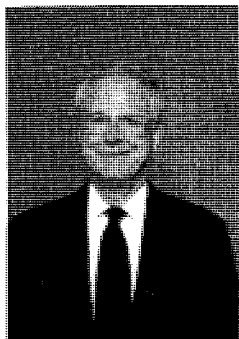
While some reject the Savior, there are others who, with the right attitude toward Him and His word, receive the Lord's word. His "sayings" to them are not hard. His word brings an abundant life now with peace, joy, fellowship with God and the people of God, and hope of life everlasting (John 10:10).

ENDNOTES

1. The Gospel Epistles of John, (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983; p. 151.
2. W.E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966), Vol. I, p.
3. A Commentary on The Gospel According to John, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co.1981), p. 23.
4. Why Believe, (Nashville, TN: Word Pub. Co., 1999), p.103.
5. Op. Cit., p.135.
6. Op. Cit., pp. 175,176.

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS: BEAR THE CROSS – LESSON 2

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The Lord Jesus said things hard to be understood not only because of the nature of the language He used, but hard to be understood because of the demand made on a person's life.

Matthew chapter 16 reveals much truth about Jesus and what He expects of those who follow Him. He warned His disciples of the danger of false doctrine when He said, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). He asked His disciples what people said relative to His identity. There were different opinions as to the nature and identity of Jesus. But Peter answered with a confession that Jesus was in reality "the Son of the living God" (Matt.16:16). On that truth that Peter confessed, Jesus promised to build His church. Then the Lord predicted that He would be killed and "be raised again the third day" (Matt.16: 21).

The Savior declared the possibility and the price to be paid by those who would be His disciples. He spoke of self-denial. He said that His disciples would have to "take up his cross, and follow Him" (Matt. 16:24).

The Lord Jesus then explained the possibility of finding life but losing it and losing life but finding it.

What will motivate people to deny self and bear the cross? Jesus gave at least three potential motivational powers.

This lesson will focus on: (1) the Lord's declaration; (2) His explanation; and (3) the motivation to deny self and bear the cross.

THE DECLARATION

The preface to the Lord's declaration is an encouraging possibility. He said, "If anyone desires to come after Me..." (Matt. 16:24). The possibility of anyone becoming a disciple had already been emphasized in the "Great Invitation" when Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). These statements from the Savior certainly reject the false doctrine of individual predestination.

A person with a past as sinful as that of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 26:9-11) may become a follower of Christ. Saul certainly did. The possibility of anyone becoming a follower of Christ should bring hope to many people. Poor people, rich people, sick folk, strong physically healthy, educated, those without a lot of formal education, are included in "If anyone desires to come after Me..."

Not only did Jesus give hope that anyone could come after Him, He was candid in explaining the requirements. He did not leave the impression that life would be easy if people became His followers. He rather explained the challenge if a person came after Him, or became His disciple. Self had to be denied. One had to be willing to bear the cross, not just wear the cross.

Denying self is indeed a challenge. The law of self-preservation can be perverted to the extent that one can become self-pleasure seeking. Barclay observed:

Ordinarily we use the word **self-denial** in a restricted sense. We use it to mean doing without something, giving up something...To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self, and to say yes to God. To deny oneself means once, finally and for all to dethrone self and to enthrone God. To deny self means to obliterate self as the dominant principle of life, and to make God the ruling principle, more, the ruling passion, of life.¹

A sinful life is one in which self is dominant. The rule is: What I want to do, what I will do. Someone observed that an analysis of the English word for sin, s-i-n, has a person, the "I," in the middle of sin. Notice how Saul reasoned in his sinful life. "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9).

Observe the dominance of self in the demands of the "prodigal son." He said, "Give me the portion of the goods that fall to me" (Luke 15:12). Later, in repenting, this young man said to the father, "Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:19).

Selfish people are unprepared to bear the cross. They may wear the cross, but they will not bear the cross. Charles R. Erdman said, "To deny himself does not mean to deny something to himself, but to renounce self."² Those who would be followers of Christ must not only deny themselves. They must take up the Lord's cross (Matt.16:24). In Luke's account the Lord said, "and take up his cross **daily**, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

In a day of luxury, comfort, convenience and ease, people generally may not be too interested in a cross-bearing religion. It is a sad commentary on some religion that seems to play to the desires of the people rather than the demands of the cross.

Coffman said:

Cross-bearing is widely misunderstood. It is not old age, poverty, taxes, illness, or bad weather, or any other discomfiture of life that comes unavoidably into the lives of men. It is the acceptance, for the sake of the will of God, of some burden or burdens, otherwise avoidable, but which are undertaken out of a pure desire to fulfill the Master's purpose.³

The old song asks and answers the question, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone...No there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me." What do we associate with a cross: pleasure or pain; sacrifice or selfishness? What is your cross? What is my cross? Any hardship, suffering, or pain that I endure for the Cause of Christ is the cross that I bear for my Savior. The cross may be rejection by family and friends. Jesus predicted that "a man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matt.10:36). The cross may be ridicule, scorn, or social ostracism. The cross may be the loss of a job, or the denial of employment. In some Muslim-dominated countries, the cross may be death.

Those who peddle a cheap religion cheapen religion. The so-called "gospel" of "health and wealth" is not the gospel of Christ.

Stephen's cross was death by stoning (Acts 7:58-60). James' cross was death by a sword (Acts 12:1, 2). Paul's cross-bearing involved being beaten, stoned to near death, thrown in prison, falsely accused, and many other "crosses" he discussed in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33.

Relative to cross-bearing, Barclay commented:

The Christian life is the life of sacrificial service. The Christian may have to abandon personal ambition to serve Christ; it may be that he will discover that the place where he can render the greatest service for Jesus Christ is somewhere where the reward will be small and where prestige

will be non-existent. He will certainly have to sacrifice time and leisure and pleasure in order to serve God through service of his fellow-men... The Christian life is the sacrificial life.⁴

Jesus plainly declared those who would be His followers must be willing to pay the price of self-denial and then be willing to sacrifice, to bear His cross.

AN EXPLANATION

Jesus talked about people saving life and losing it and losing life and finding it. This statement is a paradoxical observation. One could "save his life" in the sense that he/she attempts to find life in the material things life on earth offers. However, material things are fragile. Moth and rust can corrupt. Thieves can break in and steal. Stocks have lost their value. If one finds "life" in terms of this world only, then what will be sure to happen? If the material pursuits have been one's life when one leaves this earthly existence, as all shall, then what or whose shall the earthly things be? (Luke 12:16-21). We will take none of the material things of this life with us when we go into eternity.

Furthermore, the material things of this life can never fill the fundamental need of a soul to be in fellowship with God. When Solomon tried to find life in the material things, he concluded that it was vanity (Ecc. 2:11). God created man to have fellowship with his Creator. Unless and until there is that fellowship, all the material things of life will never fully satisfy the need within one's soul.

One may attempt to find life in the pursuit of pleasure, but that person will eventually discover what others have already seen, namely, that there is not anything that takes true pleasure out of life faster than putting too much of the wrong kind of pleasure into one's existence.

One may try to find life in position and power. However, the glory of man is fickle. The apostle Peter said that the glory of man

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS: BEAR THE CROSS
LESSON 2

53

is "as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falls away" (1 Pet.1:24).

One may indeed lose his/her life for the Lord's sake, but in that loss one finds life. One finds the "abundant life" that Jesus came to give (John 10:10). A life of peace, joy, fulfillment, rewarding fellowship with God and with the people of God.

One also finds the promise of everlasting life in heaven (1 John 2:25; John 14:1-3).

Erdman has an informative explanation relative to finding life:

One who suffers for the sake of Christ will enjoy eternal life in heaven; this is true; but the promise is of a present experience as well. Jesus is not urging sacrifice for its own sake, but, quite definitely, sacrifice for his sake and the gospel's. Such sacrifice results in the enrichment of life, and in the enjoyment of all that is worthy the name of life.⁵

Does it pay to serve Jesus? When a would-be follower of Christ contemplates the necessity of bearing the cross, is the blessing received worth the price of sacrifice that has to be paid? The Lord's motivational efforts follow the emphasis on paying the price to be His disciple.

MOTIVATION

Jesus said, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" It is not possible to gain the whole world materially, politically, or socially. Our power is too limited, and our days on this earth are too brief for anyone to "gain the whole world." Suppose one could and did own all material things on earth and ruled over all people on the earth, but died and went to hell. What really has he profited? In a few years, who will know and who will care? Of what value is the world's fame if one is experiencing hell's flame?

The man in Jesus' parable who found his life in terms of crops, barns, and ease of soul was identified as a "fool." He may have been a successful farmer, but he was a failure in life. One may be, by the world's criteria, a successful businessman, or a successful professional person, or a world-renowned politician, but if he/she misses eternal life in heaven, what has one really accomplished? One may indeed earn many pages in history books. There may be books of biography written. But if God has not written one's name in the book of life, what has one really accomplished?

The Lord's next effort at motivation involved His coming and the final judgment. He declared, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

New Testament Scripture gives strong emphasis to the fact that Jesus will indeed come again. One out of every twenty five verses of New Testament Scripture states either directly or indirectly the profound truth that Jesus will come again.

In some of the earliest inspired letters of the apostle Paul, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, he emphasized the Lord's second coming. The Second Coming of Christ is as sure as death (Heb. 9:27). He came the first time to bring an offering for sin. Indeed, as the apostle declared: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim.1:15). When He comes again it will be without a sin offering (Heb. 9:27). He will come to raise the dead (John 5:28, 29), to judge the nations (Matt. 25:31-46), to welcome into life everlasting those who identified with Him, who were His disciples indeed (John 8:31).

The solemn affirmation of the Lord's coming has potential power to cause people to evaluate their priorities or emphasis in life in terms of that ultimate day, the Day of the Lord's return. A day known only to the Father (Matt. 24:35, 36). The realization that when the Lord comes in judgment then all people will appear before His judgment throne (2 Cor. 5:10), and they will give account to the Lord for the deeds that have been done while in the body on earth, could and should cause people to be constantly

evaluating their plans and actions in view of the judgment's review.

Will one's financial standing on earth be a factor in the day of judgment? Only from the standpoint of how material things were used. No advantage will be experienced in judgment based on how wealthy one was while on the earth. Will political prominence be an important factor in judgment? Will kings, queens, presidents, governors have an advantage over poor, powerless people on earth? Will people who have many educational degrees have an advantage over those who did not finish high school? The basis of judgment will not be what one had on earth, but who he/she was in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will "reward each according to his works."

When the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write about inevitable judgment, Paul said that God will give immortality, glory and honour to those who have been saved by the gospel (Rom. 1:16, 17) and who "by patience continuance in doing good" seek for God's eternal blessings (Rom. 2:7).

On the other hand, "those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness" can anticipate indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish" because the righteous judgment of God will render "to each one according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:8, 9; 2:6).

Selfish, self-seeking people will probably find Jesus' challenge to "deny self" difficult to believe and harder to accept. People who want a religion that provides what they desire rather than the true religion of sacrifice will probably find Jesus' words in Matthew 16:24-28 difficult to believe and hard to obey. Those who are so caught in the pursuit of life, in terms of the here and now exclusively will not only miss life now, that is, the abundant life, but they will miss eternal life. What a sad decision to trade the brief here and now for the eternal. What an unfortunate decision to deny the life of sacrifice, peace, purpose and hope, for the present, passing, existence on this earth.

One cannot reach up and get a firm clasp of the Savior's hand if one is trying to tenaciously hold to the world of material things, worldly pleasure, position and power. Jesus would urge us to reject the less for the best. He would remind us that if we are willing to sacrifice our souls in order to gain the world, we not only will miss the life He came to give, we will miss the joys of eternal life in heaven.

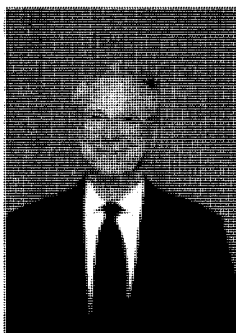
The Savior would encourage us to evaluate what we do now in light of the reward or consequence in the day of judgment. We should be reminded that only those who bear the cross will wear the crown. We need to remember that in finding we lose; in losing we find. Things Jesus said that may be hard to practice will nonetheless, bring life, peace, joy, purpose and life eternal.

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HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS: "LOVE AS I HAVE LOVED" – LESSON 3

TOM HOLLAND



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There were things that Jesus said that were "hard or difficult" because the language He used in a figurative sense people may have interpreted in a literal sense. Jesus' words may have been "hard" because of the demand that they made on the lives of His would-be disciples. Jesus did not attempt to gain followers by presenting His truth as something that required minimum devotion, but His word brought maximum blessings. Jesus spoke to and about those who could not be His disciples. Three times in Luke chapter 14, Jesus talked to and about those that could not be His disciples. The Lord declared: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Then He said, "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Finally, the Savior said, "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has

cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26; 14:27; 14:33).

However demanding and even difficult following Christ may be, the blessing of an "abundant life" now (John 10:10), and the eternal life the Lord provides will be worth any price that one may have to pay. The song reminds us, "It pays to serve Jesus, it pays everyday..."

One of Jesus' hard or demanding statements was made to His apostles the night He demonstrated the way to greatness, namely, by serving others. As He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17), He said to them, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:14).

As we examine this "new commandment," emphasis will be given to the implication in the word "commandment." Next, we shall consider the perspective on "love." Then, attention will be given to an exciting possibility relative to love. Finally, the importance of the "new commandment" will be studied.

COMMANDMENT

The word Jesus used that is translated "commandment" means, "an injunction, charge, precept...signifies to enjoin upon, charge with..."¹ Imagine a mere man making such a statement! Surely the identity of Jesus, and especially His authority, are involved in His giving a "commandment."

Not everyone respects the Lord's declaration relative to His authority. How did the Jews react to the Lord's power to forgive sins? (Mark 2:10). Some said, "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7).

How did many people react to Jesus' Sermon on The Mount? They were astonished at His teaching "for He taught them as one having authority..." (Matt. 7:28,29).

Implicit in the giving of a "commandment" is the nature of Jesus as "the Christ" and as "Lord." Several times in John 13, Jesus is recognized as "Lord" or "Ruler," One with authority.

Respect for the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ impacts every aspect of discipleship. One obeys Jesus when Jesus is respected as "Lord." When Saul encountered Jesus while Saul was on the road to Damascus, when Jesus identified Himself to Saul as, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting..." HOW did Saul react to Jesus? "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:5,6). Obedience to the commands of Christ Jesus comes from a respect for Jesus as Lord.

The authority of Christ influences the way one lives his/her life as a Christian. When the inspired apostle was applying the truth of the preeminence of Christ to the lives of Christians, he said, "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Col. 3:17). Then in a specific application to the family, the apostle said, "Wives, submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18). Children were told to obey their parents "for this is well pleasing to the Lord" (Col. 3:20). In the inspired instruction to servants, Paul mentioned the "Lord" three times (Col. 3:22-24).

When Jesus gave a "new commandment," He did so because He had the authority to give the commandment.

PERSPECTIVES ON LOVE

"Love" is one of the key words of both Old and New Testaments. In fact, the entire law and the prophets could be summarized in the commands "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself." When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest law of the Old Covenant, He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39).

When Moses was repeating God's law to Israel in the Deuteronomy, the law of love for God was declared (Deut. 6:4). In Leviticus, Moses stated the law of love for neighbor (Lev.19:18). Love for God was not some shallow, sentimental emotion. But as Barclay observed:

It means that to God we must give a total love, a love which dominates our emotions, a love which directs our thoughts, and a love which is the dynamic of our actions...Our love for God must issue in love for men...It is only when we love God that man becomes loveable...The basis of the love of man is firmly grounded in the love of God.³

When Jesus spoke of a "new commandment to love," He used a word for "love" that, according to Thayer, denotes "affection, good-will, love, benevolence."⁴ Someone defined the word that Jesus used for love as: "benevolence in action" or, "active goodwill."

But why would Jesus speak about a "new commandment" if the Old Covenant required love for God and love for one's neighbor? In what sense was the commandment "new"? Guy N. Woods wrote:

The Lord's command to love was 'new' in that the love he enjoined differed from that ever before required. The law of Moses contained an edict to love (Lev.19:18), but this was discharged within the narrow limits of the Jewish state; this is new with reference to its breadth, and width, and scope...and not new as not having been heard before.⁵

Furthermore, the Lord's Law of Love was "new" in that love had a new and ideal standard. Jesus said, "as I have loved you." This new standard for love also becomes an ideal toward which faithful disciples of the Lord should strive.

The apostle John, who has been identified as "the apostle of love," wrote much about love. He said, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (1 John 3:11). John had just discussed the fact that a failure to love brethren is in the same category as failing to practice righteousness (1 John 3:10).

Since Jesus is the criterion for love of brethren, we need to consider the manifestations of the love that Jesus demonstrated. Barclay gave four characteristics of Jesus' love.

1. Jesus loved His disciples selflessly...But Jesus never thought of Himself. His one desire was to give Himself and all that He had for those He loved. His one desire was to do something for them, something that He knew that He alone could do.
2. Jesus loved His disciples sacrificially. There was no limit to what His love would give, and to where His love would go...*If* love meant the Cross, Jesus was prepared to go to the Cross.
3. Jesus loved His disciples understandingly. He knew His disciples through and through. He knew all their weaknesses and yet He still loved them. Those who really love us are the people who know us at our worst and who still love us...The heart of Jesus is big enough to love us as we are.
4. Jesus loved His disciples forgivingly...There was no failure that He could not forgive...all enduring love must be built on forgiveness, for without forgiveness it is bound to die.⁶

In light of these four characteristics, we need to ask ourselves: Do we love the way Jesus loved? The "new commandment" is: "love as I have loved you."

AN EXCITING POSSIBILITY

When Jesus said "love as I have loved," is He stating an impossibility? Woods observed: "The phrase, 'even as I have loved you,' is sometimes interpreted to mean **to the extent** that I have loved you, but this is impossible for fallible human beings." Barclay declared: "Even in the noblest human love, there remains some element of self. We so often think/— maybe unconsciously — of what we are to get from love."⁸

Whether or not we can love as Jesus loved depends on the degree of our conformity to the "image of God's Son." In the apostle Paul's profound discussion of the great purpose and plan of God for the salvation of mankind, the apostle declared the objective of God's call and our election by Him. The objective: "He also predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Paul declared this objective to the churches of Galatia when he wrote: "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:20).

The British writer, C. S. Lewis, said: "It is so easy to think that the church has a lot of different objects--education, building, missions, holding services...The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs."⁹

Why the emphasis on "conforming to the image of Christ" or having Christ "formed in us" so that we in reality become, as Lewis said, "little Christs"? The explanation is in the Christ identifying with mankind. Someone observed that while Jesus was on earth, He was man's idea of God. What was God really like? Look at Jesus. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). But Jesus was more than man's idea of God. He was also God's ideal of man. What did God purpose in the creation of mankind before sin came to mar God's creation? Look at Jesus. That indeed is what God had purposed. Therefore, when we identify with Christ and are established in a relationship to Him whereby we are said to be "in Him" (Gal. 3:27), then we seek to

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS: "LOVE AS I HAVE LOVED" 63
LESSON 3

have Him in us. Paul said, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col.1:27).

Those "in Him" and those "in whom" He dwells have the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:5). They think the way Jesus thought, and they know the way He thought by going to the revelation of His mind in the New Testament.

Those who aspire to be like Jesus have His love for His disciples as their ideal, as their challenge to love as He loved. Even though they may not love to the extent that Jesus loved, nonetheless, they have that criterion toward which they strive and as an objective for their lives.

IMPORTANCE OF THE "NEW COMMANDMENT"

Jesus stated the importance of brotherly love when He said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). There are interesting implications in Jesus' declaration. One sees the need of "all" to know the true nature of the Lord's followers. Throughout the years, the Cause of Christ has been hindered by those who gave the world the wrong impression of true Christianity. People came to the wrong conclusion about the Lord because people thought that the false or fickle were real representatives of Jesus.

On the other hand, there is the positive power of an effective demonstration of genuine or sincere faith, such as Timothy's grandmother and mother had (1 Tim. 1:6). There was an obvious influence for good in Timothy's life. There is that same potential power for good in the manifestation of brotherly love in the lives of the Lord's followers.

People can see true love because it will manifest itself. John, who heard Jesus talk about the importance of love and the fact that love confirms genuine discipleship, was inspired to write, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18).

Evidences of love are shown when one sees and gives to a brother in need (1 John 3:17). Love destroys envy (1 John 3:12). Love casts hatred out of one's heart (1 John 3:15; 4:20).

Love is important because it is a "personal apologetic." John wrote: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren..." (1 John 3:14). With whom do I feel more comfortable, with children of God, or with children of the Devil? Whose company do I seek, people of the world, or people of God?

Furthermore, love is important because it is one of the Lord's commandments. John said, "And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). Earlier, John had discussed the necessity of keeping the Lord's commandments. "He who says, 'I know Him', and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

Can love be commanded? Biblical love can be commanded. Jesus said, "Love your enemies." Is it possible to love someone who is against us; someone who seeks to harm us; someone who attempts to destroy our reputation and our work for the Lord? If one views "love" as an emotional response, then it would be difficult to command love. But biblical love that is commanded is "active goodwill." One can seek the good, even the salvation, of a person that has demonstrated that he/she is our enemy. Love is stronger than hate.

What will motivate one to practice Galatians 6:1 and James 5:19,20? Love for a brother or sister who may have been "overtaken in a fault," or one who has "erred from the truth," will cause a faithful brother or sister to do what they can to "restore" or "convert" the one who has been taken by sin and error. Love means that we will get involved in the spiritual needs of others.

HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS: "LOVE AS I HAVE LOVED" 65
LESSON 3

The love that the Lord's people have for one another shines like the sun in a dark world of hate, greed, envy, neglect, and murder. Getz said, "People who truly care for one another attract attention."¹⁰

The way Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" actually means, "If you keep on having love for one another."¹¹ The love that the Lord's disciples have for one another is like a beautiful crystal stream of water ever flowing from a perennial Spring-The Fountain of life.

Guy N. Woods has an interesting and informative comment about Jesus' declaration, "By this shall all know that You are My disciples, if you have love, [or keep on loving] one for another." Woods said:

Love is to be a mark or token by which Christians may be distinguished from people of the world. These distinguishing features do not include manner of dress, nor peculiarity of speech--these distinctions may be easily counterfeited--but by love the only characteristic of Christians which Satan cannot fabricate.¹²

Jesus' "new commandment" has Him for the ideal, the great example to follow. Human limitations may make it difficult and in the minds of some impossible to attain, nonetheless, it is the ideal toward which faithful disciples strive.

The "love" of the "new commandment" is not the emotional, fickle "love" the world constantly sings about and "portrays" in movies and telecasts. Biblical love is active goodwill.

The love of the "new commandment" is so important that Jesus made it a "badge of discipleship." The love of the "new commandment" is a powerful teacher for good. So, in the words of the inspired writer of Hebrews, "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1).

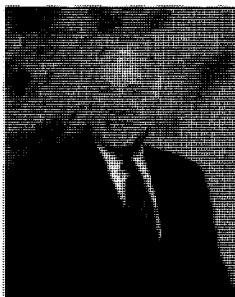
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THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

MATTHEW 24

MARLIN CONNELLY



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For two weeks last fall, I found myself juggling various responsibilities of a mission trip in Italy while working on the manuscript for this 3-day study of Matthew 24 and 25. Searching for a way to introduce these lessons, I took time to visit again an ancient monument in Rome. At the southwest end of the cobblestone street of the old Roman Forum, near the Colosseum, is the Arch of Titus, erected in A.D. 81 to commemorate the Roman sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish Temple in A.D. 70. Murals carved into the stonework of the interior of the arch depict two scenes. One portrays the victorious Titus on his return to Rome, riding in triumph in his decorated chariot. The other shows his soldiers carrying treasures taken from the destroyed Jewish Temple. Held high by them is the large seven-branched menorah, the "lamp stand" taken from the Temple's holy place.

Waiting for a gap in the passing crowds, hoping I could improve on the pictures I had taken of those scenes in earlier years, I wondered how many of those who were happily chattering their ways through the arch realized what they were passing. There, enduring for over 19 centuries, was a graphic reminder of the truth of Christ's Matthew 24 announcement of the Temple's destruction coming within the life of that generation.

We begin today a three-day study of the Lord's instruction to His disciples found in Matthew; chapters 24 and 25. To understand of whom Jesus speaks in the final 35 verses of Matthew 24, we must first spend time in the ante-room of Matthew 23.

In three chapters (23, 24, 25) Jesus covers two grand themes: (1) The End of the Temple's Times (23:1-24:35) and (2) The End of All Time (24:36-25:46). The first theme is covered in two addresses by Jesus. The first sermon (Ch. 23) was delivered in the temple "to the multitudes" (the crowds who were in Jerusalem for the Passover) and "to His disciples" (23:1). His second address was made on the Mount of Olives, after He had left the Temple, and was to His disciples in answer to two questions they had asked (24:1-3). It is essential to note, however, that the chapter 23 sermon, as well as the chapter 24 discourse, deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in their time (see 23:36-38; 24:1,2,34).

THE CHAPTER 23 SERMON

The sermon to the Passover crowds divides into two parts: (1) The Aberrations of Pharisees (23:1-36) and (2) The Abandonment of Jerusalem (23:37-38).

Jesus first warned the crowds of the Pharisees' deviations: preaching without practicing, binding heavy burdens, and self-exaltation (vv. 1-12). Then, in apostrophe, He addressed the Pharisees, unleashing seven woes upon them (vv. 13-33). The last of these linked their ancestors who murdered the prophets to those who would martyr teachers Christ would send to them (vv. 29-34). As a result, all the innocent bloodshed on the earth would

come on their generation (vv. 35-36). Remember those words when we reach Matthew 24:34.

How would all the carnage come upon “this generation” to whom Jesus was speaking? Jesus explained. Their “house” was to be “left desolate” (v. 38). God would abandon the city and the Temple, just as He had done in the day of Jeremiah (Jer. 12:7; 22:5; 25:1-11).

THE END OF TEMPLE TIMES THE CHAPTER 24 DISCOURSE

The first part of this chapter (vv. 1-35) continues to deal with the end of Temple Times as Jesus answers the first of two questions asked by his disciples. In this section, Jesus will take on four tasks:

1. He will correct His disciples' abstraction (vv. 1-2);
2. He will calm their apprehensions (vv. 3-14; note vv. 4,6,13);
3. He will coach them for the Roman assault (vv. 15-31);
and
4. He will confirm His announcement (vv. 32-35).

CORRECTING THEIR ABSTRACTION (24:1-2)

The word “abstract” comes from a Latin word which means to draw only some things from a larger collection. Abstract art concentrates on a few facets, while ignoring most of the available details. To abstract is to fish with a large-mesh net, which lets most of the potential catch slip back into the pond. The disciples must have been listening with such a net when Jesus spoke of the desolation of Jerusalem (23:37-38). For as He departed the Temple, the disciples were commenting on the size and beauty of its stones, as if Jesus had said nothing about its destruction (see Mark 12:1; Luke 22:5). It seems the disciples were filtering the earlier sermon through their past experiences and their present desires. The Lord quickly added detail to their abstraction – one stone of the Temple was not to be left upon another! All were to be thrown down (24:2).

It is essential that we see the coupling between this sentence (24:2), which begins his discourse in Chapter 24, and the announcements of Jerusalem's doom at the end of His Chapter 23 sermon (23:35-38). Both deal with the same destruction on the same Jerusalem at the same time – on *that* generation (23:36; 24:34).

CALMING THEIR APPREHENSION (24:3-14)

The Lord's plain prediction of the doom of Jerusalem brought forth two anxious questions from the disciples. The first asked *when?* "When will these things be?" The second asked *what?* "What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" (24:3).

In verses 24 through 35, Jesus answers the *when* question. This answer begins with the assurance that the destruction was not yet immediate and imminent (vv. 4-14). We now know it was still 37 years away. This calming section dealt first with *those who deceive* (vv. 4-5) and secondly with *things which disturb* (vv. 6-14).

Those who would attempt to deceive (v. 4) were the Messianic pretenders of which there would be many (v. 5). In his *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus wrote for example, of the Sicari, a Messianic movement which arose in the 50's, and of Menahem, and Simon bar Giora, both of whom posed as kings in the 60's. He also explained the people were driven to rebellion by "an ambiguous oracle in their sacred scripture" that one from their country would become ruler of the world.

Things which would disturb in the turbulent times before Jerusalem's destruction rapidly pour out next:

1. "Wars and rumors of wars" – Josephus provides quite a catalog of these (*Ant.*, Book XVIII, chapters 3,4,5,8; Book XX, chapters 1,3,4,5; *Wars*, Book II, chapters 12, 14-16).

2. Natural disasters, such as “famines and earthquakes,” appear in Acts 11:27-30 (Jos., Ant., Book XX, chapters 2,5); Matt. 28:2; Acts 16:26.
3. Persecution of Christians, including hatred, tribulation, and death appears in Acts 4:13-31; 5:17-42; 6:8; 8:4; 9:1-2; 12:1-11; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; 5:6-10; Heb. 12:3-4; 13:3,13-14.
4. The rising up of “many false prophets” who would “deceive many” (v. 11) is a fourth element to mark those disturbing times prior to A.D. 70. The appearance of these is evident in such passages as 2 Cor. 11:3, 13-15; 2 Pet. 2:1; and 1 John 4:11.
5. Perhaps because of the false teachers in v. 11, “lawlessness” (literally “the lawlessness,” a unique one) would abound dislodging some whose love would “grow cold” (v. 12). Note Paul’s warning in 2 Tim. 3:1-5.
6. A final thing to appear in those nervous times before the Temple’s end would not be another troubling element, but a heartening one – the good news of the kingdom would “be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations” (v. 14). “All the world” and “all the nations” must be seen as *synecdoche*, a figure of speech in which the whole is put in place of the part (as in Luke 2:1 and Col. 1:23). Perhaps this spread of the gospel did not come as much *in spite* of the troubles described in verses 6-13, as *because* of those events. Troubles have a way of making us stronger (James 1:2-5; Heb. 12:4-11). Those who would become equipped to endure would be enthused to evangelize. At the end of this list of troubling things utter pessimism is “cut off at the pass.”

At the beginning of chapter 24, the disciples had asked Jesus two questions, the first of which dealt with a *when* – when would the Temple be destroyed? The Lord’s answer made clear that, though Jerusalem was *imperiled*, its destruction was not, at that time, *imminent*. In verse 6, He had said “see that you are not troubled at all; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.” Only after a longer list of predicted troubles had ended

on a note of triumph for the gospel would He announce, "And then the end will come" (v. 14).

COACHING FOR THE ASSAULT (24:15-28)

After calming their apprehension, Jesus moved to the next stage of the discourse – coaching for the Roman assault (vv. 15-28). This was done in three parts:

1. Using the words of Daniel the prophet, He would *define the destroyer* (v. 15);
2. giving evacuation instructions, He would *divert them from dangers* (vv. 16-28);
3. using old-testament symbols, He would *describe the denouement* of the destruction of the city and its Temple (vv. 29-31)

DEFINING THE DESTROYER (24:15)

Addressing Jewish disciples, Jesus used the words of Daniel to define the destroyer. The term, "abomination of desolation" appears four times in Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). That prophet employed the expression to characterize an action to come later than his day when Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C. would erect over the Temple's altar of burnt offering an altar to Zeus on which he would offer a swine sow. Jesus borrowed the expression, applying it to characterize the Roman army which would offer at the eastern gate pagan sacrifices to their ensigns when they would proclaim Titus as their Emperor (Josephus, War VI, 6).

The expression "abomination of desolation" is probably genitive of description meaning an abomination *characterized by* desolation (which it would bring to the city and the Temple). The word rendered "abomination," means to feel nausea because of a stench, to detest something.

To this allusion to Daniel's description both Matthew and Mark added the parenthetical expression, "Let the reader understand." They meant the reader should comprehend the

likeness between what Antiochus did and what the Romans would do. They were applying Daniel to their time.

Writing for Gentiles, Luke felt no need to use Daniel to define the Roman action which would be a sign to flee the city. He explained in plain language that Jesus was saying, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20).

Some have raised the question, "If the city was surrounded, how could anyone flee?" The answer may lie in the fact that the word rendered "surrounded" is in the present tense, implying a *continuing* action. The surrounding is not yet completed. If it were, the instruction to flee the city would be pointless. *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke* (published by the United Bible Societies to assist those translating the Bible into the many languages spoken in today's world) suggests the rendering be "that armies are engaged in surrounding" or "on the point of surrounding."

DIVERTING FROM DANGERS (24:16-28)

Having used an expression from Daniel to define the coming destroyer, Jesus next sought to divert his disciples from the coming dangers. His instruction was to the point: as the Romans began the process of surrounding the city with camps (v. 15), His disciples in Judea were to "flee to the mountains" (v. 16). One on a housetop should make his escape across the flat roofs of the city, taking no time to retrieve items from his own house (v. 17). One in a field should not enter the city to get even that vital cloak which was ones cover for the night (v. 18). They also should pray that the time for fleeing would not be in the winter or on the Sabbath (v. 20). Winter in Palestine is the rainy season in which storms in the mountains swell the *wadis*, the water courses out of the mountains, creating torrents which sweep away whatever is in their paths (Mat. 7:24-27). Further, at that time in Judea, Pharisees sought to restrict Sabbath-day travel to 2000 paces, i.e., about half a mile (Acts 1:12).

Jesus was urging disciples to flee what would be “great tribulation,” unlike what had come before or would come (vv. 21-22). The Roman siege of Jerusalem did bring unprecedented slaughter and famine. The descriptions of Josephus tell of the carnage with over a million killed, with famine-induced cannibalism in which mothers ate their own children (War, V, 10). Since that time, no city has suffered the extermination or enslavement of such a high percentage of its population.

To escape the siege, the disciples were to “flee to the mountains” (v. 16). Eusebius, in his *Church History* written in the 4th Century, says the disciples fled to Pella (one of the 10 cities of the Decapolis east of the River Jordan and southeast of the Lake of Galilee).

Yet, Jesus sought not only to divert his disciples from the danger of *physical tribulation*, but from *false expectation*, as well. Therefore, He explained that the days of the Roman siege would see “false Christs” arise (v. 24). But, in contrast to the furtive nature of these pseudo-Christes, the Lord’s coming will be evident to everyone instantaneously. Jesus used two pictures to show this *clear coming*: (1) It will be as clear as lightning which flashes out of the east and is seen into the west (v. 27). (2) It will be as clear as a carcass is to vultures circling over it (v. 28). John wrote in the Apocalypse: “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him” (Rev. 1:7).

DESCRIBING THE DENOUEMENT (24:29-31)

The word *denouement* is not an everyday, household word. Coming through the French language from the Latin, it refers to the untying of a knot. It is the point at which there is the unraveling or clarification of a plot, the final revelation or outcome. Out of the tangle of the terrible destruction of Jerusalem an idea will emerge - - What God says will happen, will happen. And when God says Christ is Lord and will come victoriously, He will come!

“Immediately after the tribulation” of Jerusalem, the idea of God’s judgment on nations would again be evident. The words of verse 29 – the darkening of sun and moon, the falling of stars, the

shaking of the powers of the heavens – are like former Old Testament figurative descriptions of the fall of cities and nations such as Babylon, Edom, and Egypt (Isa. 13:9-19; 34:2-6; Ezek. 32:1-8). The events at Jerusalem would be a “sign” (v. 30) for all the earth that Jesus is the “Son of Man” (i.e., one associated with *all* mankind) and that He will come in “great glory.”

This emerging idea, would not only produce sobriety, it would bring about conversions as Jesus would send out His *angelous*, His messengers to call “His elect” (Mat. 28:18-20).

At this point one should not miss “markers” in the text which give us clues to *when* and *where* this time of “great tribulation” was to take place. It relates to the destruction of a Temple which existed when Jesus was speaking (23:38; 24:1-2); it relates to what was to come upon the “generation” to whom Jesus was speaking (23:36; 24:34); it deals with people in *Judea* who could and did flee to the mountains (24:16); and it deals with a time when Sabbath-day-travel restrictions were enforced (24:20).

CONFIRMING HIS ANNOUNCEMENT (24:32-35)

“Learn this lesson [lit., *parabole*, parable] from the fig tree,” Jesus said. The coming of its tender twigs and leaves means summer is near. In the same way all the things He had been describing were signs the end of the Temple times was near (24:32-33). “Assuredly” (lit., *amen*), Jesus said, “I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled” (24:34). And His words are more lasting than the heaven and the earth (24:35).

A minority of evangelicals known as Dispensationalists take Matthew 24:4-28 (or at least vv. 15-28) to refer to what they call the “Great Tribulation” of seven years, and 24:29-35 to refer to the second coming of the Lord. I believe this position has three weaknesses:

1. It ignores the obvious links between the Lord’s announcement of doom (the “woes”) on the Jerusalem of the scribes and Pharisees (in Chap. 23) with the first

question of the disciples and His answer (in Chapter 24).

2. It fails to deal with the way Mark 13:4 and Luke 21:7 record for us the disciples' question. Their first question clearly concerns a judgment on *their* Jerusalem and *their* temple. How could they think, therefore, that Jesus was not answering their question but was describing some *second* destruction of that city?
3. It fails to give the ordinary meaning to "this generation" in Matthew 23:36 and 24:34. When Matthew uses it elsewhere it refers to the people alive in the time of Jesus (11:16; 12:39, 41-42; 23:36). Luke uses the term in the same way (11:50-52; 17:25).

THE END OF ALL TIME

Having answered the first question of His disciples concerning when the Temple would be destroyed, Jesus moved to the second question: "What shall be the sign of Thy coming and end of the age?" Aside from this verse (24:3), this expression, "the end of the age" is used five other times in the New Testament. Hebrews 9:26 views Christ's crucifixion as a marker introducing "the end of the ages." The other four uses are in Matthew (13:39, 40, 49; 28:20) and are used to mean the end of this present world in the coming of a final judgment.

When Jesus was wrapping up the first question concerning signs of the end of the Temple Times, He had assured the disciples, "When you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors" (24:33). It will not be so, however, with the end of all time. "Heaven and earth will pass away...But of that day and hour no one knows...but my Father only" (24:35-36).

THE NOAH'S-FLOOD ANALOGY (24:37-41)

To emphasize our uncertainty of when all time shall end, Jesus compared His final coming to the sudden surprise of the great flood of Noah's day. Engaged in their ordinary pursuits, dining and wining, gorging and guzzling, their secular

preoccupations led to a secular indifference, until the flood (*Kataklysmos*, cataclysm) destroyed them all (24:38-39).

In two vignettes (24:40-41), Jesus pictured the same sudden surprise should time's end have come in his hearers' day. Applied to our time, the two men in a field and the two women at the mill might have become two men on the golf course and two women having lunch together at the Puffy Muffin. But his lesson is clear: "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (24:42).

THE SURPRISED HOMEOWNER ANALOGY (24:43-44)

Jesus then posed a hypothetical situation in which the master of a house, not knowing a thief would be coming, let himself be surprised. Again, the other side of the comparison is evident before Jesus voiced it. In regard to His coming, we must not be caught off-guard in unexpectedness.

THE TWO-SERVANTS PARABLE (24:45-51)

Jesus next juxtaposed two servants in a household: one wise, and one wicked; one diligent in his assigned tasks, and one dilatory, disregarding responsibility as he said to himself, "My master delays his coming." But the Master would make an unexpected and abrupt end to the dissipation of the swaggering servant. The words of Jesus make the point of the parable: that servant's master would "come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of..."(v. 50).

Surely, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).

THE FOOLISH VIRGINS PARABLE (25:1-13)

In the mid 1960's, while I was a college student at David Lipscomb, most freshmen were wary of taking the required English courses under Professor Jennie P. Brown. While respected and admired, she was feared as well, for the one question she would put to each student each day as she called

the roll. As she called the name of each student in a very formal way, she would then intone: "Prepared or unprepared?" Miss Jennie's question lives on in my mind each time I read again the Lord's teaching on the end of all time. "Prepared or unprepared?" is the *implied* theme of the three "slice-of-life" depictions Jesus has given in the last of Chapter 24. Whether it was those of Noah's day surprised by the flood, or an unwary homeowner caught off-guard by a thief, or a wicked servant shocked by the unexpected arrival of the master – all were *unprepared* for a coming.

As Chapter 25 opens, Miss Jennie's theme continues. In His parable of the ten virgins invited to a wedding feast, five were foolish because they were *unprepared* for the delayed coming of the bridegroom. They had neglected to take replacement oil for their lamps. As this parable has been taught in both book and sermon, it has collected accretions until it has become, in the hands of some, not a parable, but an allegory. Almost every item in the story – the feast, the lamps, the oil, the virginity of the bridesmaids, their slumbering, those selling oil, and the shut door – has become a source of some hidden meaning which someone thinks the listener or reader should see. There is but one lesson here. The unprepared five were "foolish" because they were unprepared for a *delayed* coming. The fact that one cannot borrow from the "oil" of others (Rom. 2:5-6; Rev. 22:12) is but the reason each, himself, should be prepared whenever the Lord comes.

THE TALENTS PARABLE (25:14-30)

The Lord's next parable extends the meaning of *preparedness* until it equals *performance*. Watchfulness is not mere passivity.

In this story, a man who made money with his money was about to travel to a far country. To insure that business continued as usual, he deposited money in the care of each of three servants, each of whom was to do business with the amount delegated to him. (The "talent" of the scriptures was a unit of exchange, a certain weight of gold, silver, or copper. Our

application of the word to an aptitude is a much later use of the word.)

“After a long time” the master of the servants returned to “settle accounts.” (The same ingredient of a delay in a return appears in 24:48, 50; 25:5; 25:19.) Each of the first two servants had worked with the capital allotted to him and had produced a nice return. The third did nothing except to bury the talent, which at the least, could have been deposited with the bankers that it might draw interest. When the master returned, the servant returned to him the unused talent. He blamed his lack of any other action on his knowledge of his master’s *skleros* (hard) nature. But this excuse was a cover for the servant’s laziness. His master used three objectives to identify the real problem: the pretender was “wicked and lazy” (v. 26) and “unprofitable” (v. 30). Here is a parable which puts to rest the innocence of laziness.

THE SHEEP-AND-GOATS ANALOGY (25:31-46)

From the beginning of His answer concerning the end of all time (24:36), the Lord has employed five stories; Each deals in some way with how to avoid the element of surprise at His second coming. The first two stories stressed the need for vigilance, the third the need for fidelity to tasks, the fourth the necessity of being prepared, and the fifth that preparedness should be equaled by performance.

In the final scene; however, all need for expectation and vigilance has passed. We are brought to a fork in the road where none no longer may make any decision, but where an eternal-destiny decision is made about each by the One on the throne of glory. “All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats” (25:32). This is no parable; it is a real description of a real coming event.

Do not expect the church to be the beneficiary of a privileged treatment which will allow us to escape this judgment. Matthew 16:27 says when the Son of Man comes with His angels

and in the glory of His Father, He will render to each person according to his deeds.

The “sheep” at His right hand will be invited to receive the reward which has been *the goal of human history*; a kingdom which has been prepared from the foundation of the earth. The perfect tense of the verb indicates it was prepared and it has remained prepared (25:34). The same advanced and remaining preparation had been made “for the devil and his angels,” and to it the “goats” on the left will be consigned (25:41)

The difference which will make the difference in destiny is how each person has responded to the needs of these Jesus calls “*my brethren*” (25:40, 45). The expected service involves little ministries of unflashy works of mercy. Six are listed, but they are illustrative, not exhaustive (25:35, 36).

But who are these “brethren” of the Lord requiring our sensitive response? There have been two main answers to this question.

1. The first view is that Jesus had in mind all needy *neighbors* in the human family. This view certainly fits the lesson of the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Lk. 10:29-37), and the story of the *Rich Man and Lazarus* (Lk. 16:19-31).
2. The second view is that the *brethren* in question are the Christians who were persecuted or needy Christian workers. In the sending the twelve on a limited commission of Matthew 10, Jesus warned of a fate worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah on those who would not receive them (10:14-15). He later added that one receiving them would be receiving Him, and any receiving a prophet or righteous man (even in giving him a *cup of cold water*) “*shall not loose his reward*” (Mat. 10:40-42).

Some have called these two views the *Love Interpretation* and the *Faith Interpretation*. To me, such a distinction seems unnecessary, for Galatians 6:6-10 seems to answer the question

concerning whom we should aid: *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”*

Let us then do the works of Him who has sent us, before the night comes when no man can work (John 9:4).

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

MATTHEW 4:1-11

PAUL SAIN



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Sincere gratitude to the elders at Karns, the director and faculty of the East Tennessee School of Preaching, and all involved in this excellent work through the years of faithful service in the Kingdom. Your "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" shines throughout the world. I am honored to participate in this series.

The theme for this series, "Jesus, The Master Teacher" must be the central point of our study, worship and lives. Our passionate desire is to mold our lives in His example (1 Peter 2:21).¹

Our Lord and Saviour was upon the earth a brief 33 years. His earthly ministry spanned a mere 36 months (approximately). He taught so many, performed great feats, conveyed compassion and love to the masses. No man taught as our Lord (John 7:46).

Yet, in this short time the events, words and actions impacted the people in the first century and continues to impact our lives today. One such event is provided in the Divine record of Matthew 4 — the temptation of Jesus. This event marks the beginning of the Lord's earthly ministry, proclaiming Him in truth as the Son of God and Son of man.

OUR TEXT

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him (Matt. 4:1-11).

Highlight with me a few key facts that specifically relate to our text:

1. "Then" leads us into the event of His temptation. We note the event of His temptation followed just after His baptism.
2. Satan, the adversary (devil = *diabolos*, which means accuser or slanderer)² is the source of temptation (James 1:14) and ever ready to attack and devour us (1 Pet. 5:8; Luke 22:31).
3. He knows when and/or where we are weak and vulnerable. After a 40-day fast, Jesus was physically low. The attacks of Satan are cunningly designed to have the greatest possibility to entice, trap, and destroy.
4. The devil employed Scripture (though in a perverted form) to make the allurements more tempting. As the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), his arsenal has many powerful and destructive weapons.
5. Satan's goal is destruction. He wants you to be a disciple of his, follow his evil ways, and ultimately to be in torment forever with him and all evil of all ages.
6. The attacks of Satan often come as waves beat upon the shores, one after another. He may retreat for a brief time, but be assured of his return. If he does not have you as a servant and disciple, he wants you!
7. Even the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was not exempt from the temptations of Satan (cf. Heb. 4:15).
8. The devil can be resisted and driven away; he is not invincible (James 4:7).

WHAT IS TEMPTATION?

Before we define "temptation," let us look for a moment at the definition of "sin." Concerning the Greek word "*hamartia*," Rex A. Turner, Sr. offers the following:

Sin [*hamartia*] has been variously defined as: "disobedience to a personal God"; "rebellion against the omnipotent Creator"; "an unethical act"; "missing the mark or aim"; "over-passing or transgressing of a line"; and "transgression of the law of God."³

Temptation (tempt) is defined as: “to try to persuade; induce or entice, esp. to something immoral or sensually pleasurable; to arouse desire in; be inviting to.”⁴

Temptation in Scripture is from the Greek noun *peirasmos* which envelopes various definitions based on context. Vine says the word is “used of trials with a beneficial purpose and effect, of trials or temptations ... of trials of a varied character ... of trials definitely designed to lead to wrong doing ... of trying or challenging God.”⁵

Brother Franklin Camp offers these gems:

1. Temptations are common to all of us (1 Cor. 10:13);
2. Temptation is the door through which Satan leads us into sin (James. 1:14-15);
3. If a Christian lives a successful Christian life, he must be able to overcome temptation.⁶

Sin, immorality, evil, wickedness, and rebellion describe “transgression of the law of God” (1 John 3:4). Such is not “new” to our culture and age. James Boyd pointed out, “Immorality is nothing new to the human experience. Such has been in evidence since the Garden of Eden...is certainly characteristic of our day.”⁷ We choose to live holy, righteous lives or to be in rebellion to the Father. Living in the flesh means to be hostile to God. Absorption by the pursuits which fascinate our sinful ways makes us an enemy of God, as James shows (James 4:4).⁸

An excellent description of the elements of temptation is:

Temptation described here [James 1:13-4] contains the elements of enticement, solicitation, and seduction—things which attack from within the person. They are events pertaining to our lives which Satan uses and through which he appeals to fleshly desires in an effort to cause us either to neglect or to transgress the law of God.⁹

H. P. Palmer wrote the uplifting words of the familiar old hymn (so relevant today) which urges us:

Yield not to temptation,
 For yielding is sin;
 Each vict'ry will help you
 Some other to win.
 Fight manfully onward,
 Dark passions subdue
 Look ever to Jesus:
 He'll carry you thro'.

To him that o'ercometh,
 God giveth a crown;
 Thro' faith we shall conquer,
 Tho' often cast down;
 He who is our Savior
 Our strength will renew;
 Look ever to Jesus:
 He'll carry you thro'.

Hear the words of wisdom from centuries past, as pertinent to our lives today as it was then:

Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage ... And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth (Deut. 8:11-17; cf. 2 Chron. 26:15-16).

The cycles of man's devotion to God, falling away from God into sin, burdened and desperate, crying out to God, and God

providing relief. One consistent key in the numerous cycles recorded in treasured Scripture is man's forgetting God and coming to feel he is the all important one. Today, man thinks he has earned this, accomplished that, secured these blessings, reaped this because of his goodness, needs to be blessed, deserves entertainment and happiness, etc. Maybe we should re-read the words of Deuteronomy 8 again.

An esteemed brother, one of my heroes, Winfred Clark, wrote:

Sometimes we find stones of stumbling in the path we seek to trod. We find that sometimes it isn't all that easy to do what needs to be done. Sometimes we think these obstacles are unique to us. If we observe the lives of others, we will find them fighting the same battles and facing some of the same foes.¹⁰

Our brief journey on earth (James 4:14) will be filled with trouble (Job 14:1). Serving God, living a righteous life is THE greatest life, but our Saviour has never promised a life without difficulties. In fact, He has warned that the way that leads to heaven is "strait" (difficult) (Matt. 7:13-14).

THE THREE AVENUES OF TEMPTATION

From the first man and woman on earth, temptation and sin have been a reality, a matter with which to be reckoned. Temptation comes in many shapes and forms. What is tempting to one may not be tempting whatsoever to another.

James instructs us regarding temptation, yielding to temptation, and the progressive nature of sin:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death (James 1:14-15).

John categorizes (defines) sin into three general classifications or “avenues” of temptation, all of which center in the human mind:

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

Dan Cates accurately stated,

1 John 2:15-17 groups temptation into three categories (the lust of the flesh, that is, what feels good; the lust of the eyes, that is, what looks good; and the pride of life, that is, what makes men look good), and each of the temptations waged against Jesus can be said to fall, respectively, into these categories.¹¹

Satan (according to a compilation of Scriptures) is the one responsible for all temptation. His “ministering servants” (2 Cor. 11:13-15) do his evil work.

To illustrate and make certain all understand the importance of John’s specific three general classifications, let us divide a few real-life temptations accordingly:

Lust Of The Flesh. “Lust” (*epithumia*) denotes “strong desire of any kind.”¹² Some of the “works of the flesh” are mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21. Paul further details such evil actions in Romans 1:29ff. Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc., are often means of temptation to man.

Lust Of The Eyes. Pornography, filthy movies and videos, ungodly and evil television programs, lust, greed, envy, are but a

few of the damaging or destructive areas of temptation utilized by the devil.

Pride Of Life. Simon Peter exhorts God's people to "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 Pet. 5:5-6). We are not to think too highly of ourselves (Rom. 12:3). Friendships have been ruined, churches have been divided, reputations ruined—simply because of one being guilty of one of the seven things God hates (the first in the list) (Prov. 6:16-17).

Satan was successful in his temptation and seduction of Eve in the Garden of Eden, with the "lust of the flesh" (Eve "saw that the tree was good for food"); "lust of the eyes" (the tree was a "delight to the eyes"); and "the pride of life" (Eve was convinced "the tree was to be desired to make one wise") (Gen. 3:6).

WAYS SATAN SOUGHT TO ENSNARE OUR LORD AND HOW HE DEALT WITH THEM

There are three recorded attempts to destroy the Son of God. We will notice Satan employed the same three avenues (desire of hunger, longing for that which is attractive, and the desire for fame and acclaim) in his attempt to destroy the Lord. The devil knew that if he could bring Him into submission through these seductive temptations, he would effectively destroy Him. Satan knew Jesus was the Son of God but knew if He yielded to his ensnarements, become subject to him, then the plan of God would be thwarted and Jesus of Nazareth would be just another human being.

In the first place, Satan stated, "If thou be the Son of God...." The baptism of Jesus had just occurred, at which time God the Father had declared, "This is my beloved Son."

First, "***If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread***" (v. 3). In the flesh, Jesus had fasted for forty days. Satan sought His submission due to His supposed weakness. Satan's first attack (temptation) of our Lord is an

appeal to the flesh. The fuel that feeds temptation is “desire.” Obviously, the more intense desire, the greater the temptation.

Eddie Whitten offers these words:

The act suggested seems not only innocent, but in accordance with His dignity....What more foolish than to continue to hunger, when a word could spread a table in the wilderness? ... The need is real, the remedy possible and easy; the result desirable as preserving valuable life, and putting an end to an anomaly, and the objections apparently nil. The bait is skilfully wound over the barbed hook.¹³

The Lord responded forcefully, “*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*” (v. 4). Vincent offers this fact:

The first recorded words of Jesus after his entrance upon his ministry are an assertion of the authority of scripture, and that though he had the fulness of the Spirit.¹⁴

Without doubt, the Lord was hungry; had fed others, but rather than yield to the adversary’s wicked agenda, He refused to feed himself. Upon the response by the Lord, Satan moved to a more seductive attempt.

Second, the devil took Him up into the holy city (Jerusalem, Luke 4:9), sat Him on a pinnacle of the temple. Winkler provides this interesting information:

The word “pinnacle” in the original denotes “wing,” such being applied to the roof of this porch of the temple because it looked like a bird flapping its wings...Barnes, relying on Josephus, identifies the area as being 700 feet above the [Kedron] valley...¹⁵

“Temple” signifies “the whole compass of the sacred enclosure, with its porticos, courts, and other subordinate buildings....”¹⁶

Satan said, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (v. 6). This was Satan’s appeal to the pride of life (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12. It is unbelievably foolish for one to quote the Scripture, out of context, to the Divine Son of God! Jesus replied, correctly using the Scripture (Deut. 6:16), “*It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*” (v. 7). It is interesting to note that Satan cannot respond to the Word of God. Jesus slammed the door shut, and Satan moved to the third attempt.

Third, the devil took Him up into a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world (confirming Satan’s roaming, knowing and as “god” of the world). He then said to Jesus, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (v. 9). Satan now is appealing to the lust of the eyes of the carpenter’s son. Satan’s offer of a kingdom is completely different than the plan of God. He offered the Lord a compromise—which is still an effective ploy today. Jesus boldly asserted, “*Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*” (v. 10). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. Simply stated, Jesus told Satan to “Begone!”

After the third attempt miserably failed, Satan departed from the scene. The Lord was triumphant. But Satan would return (as he did prior to the Lord’s death). Luke’s gospel account states, “he departed from him for a season” (Luke 4:13; cf. Matt. 16:23; Luke 22:28). Satan would work his evil ways through jealous scribes, the betrayer Judas, the wicked Sanhedrin, and the uncontrolled hateful rage that existed around the cross.

Christians are strengthened to know that the Saviour who endured and was triumphant over the temptations from Satan is our Saviour, Lord, Master, Redeemer, and THE one who succors

us who are tempted today (Heb. 2:17-18). He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

THINGS WE MUST PRACTICE TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

An abundance of inspired passages exhort us to endure, stand fast, be faithful, and live godly in this present world. Further, there are numerous warnings to not be entangled again, overcome, seduced, tossed to and fro, etc. by the wiles and temptations of the devil.

Come to the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour (2 Pet. 2:20), the truth that can make us free (John 8:32). Hearing the word of God produces faith (Rom. 10:17). We can understand the truth (Eph. 3:4). The Word of God has the same strength and power to help us in times of temptation and persecution—if we will but avail ourselves of its power (Heb. 4:12; Rom. 1:16; James 1:21-25). Reading and feeding on the inspired Word enables us to discern between good and evil, points one to follow the way of God instead of the way of man, the spiritual instead of fleshly.

Add To Your Faith. The apostles asked of the Lord, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). In 2 Peter 1:5-11, we note the qualities we must add to our faith. It is possible for our faith to waver (James 1:6), be shipwrecked (1 Tim. 1:19), or be destroyed (1 Cor. 10:10; 2 Cor. 4:9). To overcome temptation, we must possess and maintain a strong faith (Rom. 4:20).

Mature And Grow In Knowledge. Paul instructed Timothy to “study to show thyself approved unto God” (2 Tim. 2:15), growing from newborn babes (1 Pet. 2:2) to those of full age (Heb. 5:12-14). Simon Peter challenged disciples to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Make Up Your Mind To Live For God, Purpose In Your Heart, And Do Not Look Back. Make the decision that you will serve the Lord. As Daniel in the long ago, purpose (commit) in your heart that you will live righteously (Dan. 1:8). Brother Turner, the sage and wise servant of God, pled with us.

The Christian must make certain decisions for himself long before Satan presents his temptations to sin. The young Christian is ahead spiritually who has made a firm decision not to smoke pot, not to drink, not to dance, not to commit fornication, not to swear and curse, and not to cheat or lie or steal. Without guiding principles and prior decisions, the Christian is liable to fall into all forms of conformity with the world.¹⁷

Refuse to allow Satan to cause you to “look back” (Luke 9:57ff) or be turned aside to the ways of the world.

Keep On Keeping On! Refuse to let Satan get in your mind or your life. He wants you to be discouraged, downtrodden, defeated, and destroyed. Let us not grow weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). May we ever press toward the mark of the prize (Phil. 3:13-14); go on toward perfection (Heb. 6:1); resolved to be more like our Saviour every day (1 Pet. 2:21). Aggressively maintain your righteous relationship with the Father, regardless of the circumstances, difficulties, trials and temptations. We are assured of the victory in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 15:57). The inspired writer (Paul) had undergone so much persecution and temptation. If ever one could have grown tired of fighting, enduring, suffering, and carrying a heavy load—it was Paul. But his optimistic attitude encourages us to “rejoice” (Phil. 4:4), make Christ my “life” (Phil. 1:21), and to “know in whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Listen To Key Scriptures Of Admonition. The words of Christ were simply: “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matt. 26:41). “Neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27). “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). “Lead us not into temptation” (Matt. 6:13). “Abstain from fleshly lusts” (1 Pet. 2:11). “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). “Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). “Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:13-18). “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing

that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:8-9). "Add to your faith...." (2 Pet. 1:5-11). "Go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1). Rest assured that "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation" (2 Pet. 2:9).

Further, avail yourself of tender encouragements through the words of various hymns. For example, the second verse of "Each Step I Take" acknowledges:

At times I feel my faith begin to waver,
 When up ahead I see a chasm wide,
 It's then I turn and look up to the Saviour,
 I am strong when He is by my side.

W. Elmo Mercer

Words and phrases in songs, quite familiar to us, would include: "Tempted and tried we're oft made to wonder, Why it should be thus all the day long...." "I need thee ev'ry hour, Stay Thou near by; Temptations lose their pow'r When thou are nigh...." "When you met with great temptation, Did you think to pray? By His dying love and merit, Did you claim the Holy Spirit As your guide and stay?" "Fear not little flock ... Ride over temptation and cease your alarms: Your Shepherd is Jesus, your refuge His arms; He'll never forsake you, a Brother and Friend, But love you and save you in worlds without end."

IMPORTANT LESSONS WE HAVE LEARNED

We are so blessed to have the faithful, inspired and saving Word of God available today. We can know truth (John 8:32). We can understand truth (Eph. 3:4). We can learn and do the will of God (Rom. 10:17; Matt. 7:21). From our text and this study we have learned:

1. Satan is our enemy. He is evil (Matt. 13:38), wicked (Matt. 13:19), mean (Luke 22:31-32), deceiving (2 Cor. 11:3), tempter (Eph. 4:26-27), liar (John 8:44), appears righteous (2 Cor. 1:14) and seeks to destroy everyone (1 Pet. 5:8). He is wise and knows where we might be

vulnerable and weak.

2. Holy men are tempted. Jesus was without sin, yet tempted (Heb. 4:15). Joseph was a righteous man, but endured temptation (Gen. 39:9). We should expect to be tempted (2 Tim. 3:12). Being tempted is not a sin; yielding to the temptation is sinful.
3. Temptations often follow significant spiritual occurrences. Jesus' baptism, then He was tempted. After Pentecost, great persecution (Acts 4:1-3). Elijah was victorious on Mount Carmel, but then was faced with dealing with Jezebel (1 Kings 18-19). After we obey the gospel, we will be tempted to return to the world.
4. Satan tempts us through (a) the lust of the flesh, (b) the lust of the eyes, and (c) the pride of life.
5. One's downfall may have resulted from yielding to a "small, insignificant or trivial" action or occurrence. A small, seemingly innocent flirtation may lead to the torments of hell. One drink may lead one to the gutter in filth and shame. It is just a quarter in a slot machine, but it may result in an addicted gambler who has lost everything.
6. Satan may tempt us at any place he chooses. Whether in the wilderness, pinnacle of the temple, in the city, personally or collectively, whatever will serve his purpose and goal best.
7. Satan knows the power in Scripture, the Word of God. He quoted Psalm 91:11-12 as a means of seeking to validate his pleas. The Word is powerful, able to save (Rom. 1:16; James 1:21; Heb. 4:12).
8. We have the power to resist, fight against, refuse to yield to Satan's temptations. Jesus did. Joseph did. We are urged to not give place to the devil (Eph. 4:27). Do not let him even get his foot in the door of your life. Refuse to place yourself in positions of temptation.
9. Until the end of time on earth, Satan will not stop! He may "flee" from us (James 4:7), but be warned, he will return. He came back to Jesus (Luke 4:13). He is persistent, militant, aggressive (Eph. 6:10-12).
10. Temptations can be helpful, beneficial. We are made

stronger, realize our dependence upon the Father, understand the brevity of life and insignificance of things of earth, and then have greater determination than ever to reach our heavenly home.

11. Victory is possible, within our reach. Paul expressed his thanks to God for the victory in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 15:57).
12. Follow the Lord's formula to avoid falling into temptation. Jesus said, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41; cf. Luke 22:46).

CONCLUSION

Often, we have acknowledged that temptations and trials can make or break us. They can destroy us or make us stronger spiritually. Take a backward glance to those who acknowledged benefit they had received from difficult times in which they had walked. (1) David, Psalm 119:71, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted.*" (2) Job, Job 23:10, "*He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*" (3) Paul, Romans 8:17, "*If so be that we suffer with him that we may be glorified together ... the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" "*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous ... afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness....*" (4) James, James 1:3, "*The trying of your faith worketh patience.*"

James states it simply: "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" (1:12).

The crown awaits the faithful. The mansion is prepared. Let us press toward the glorious home of the soul. Let us fight against the enemy, resist temptation, refuse to give an "inch" or he likely would become your ruler, and be strengthened in the confidence of the victory in Christ Jesus.

ENDNOTES

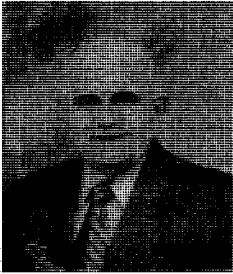
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JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

JOHN 14-16

ROBERT R. TAYLOR, JR.



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INTRODUCTION

Genuine gratitude is expressed to James Meadows, the School, the elders, and the Karns congregation for the treasured invitation to speak and pen a chapter for the lectureship volume. Jesus, The Master Teacher, is an idea whose time has come for an entire lectureship. His lovely link with the Holy Spirit, my assignment, is vital.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

To some, the Holy Spirit is only an influence. To some, the Holy Spirit is a cosmic power. To some, the Holy Spirit is a glorified it. To some, He is a submissive puppet for them to manipulate in any fashion they desire. To some, He is doing now what He has always done especially in the supernatural realm. To some, He still speaks to preachers and lays messages upon their

hearts, making unnecessary any previous study on their part. A man once rushed up to G. K. Wallace and asked if he were a Christian, saying the Holy Spirit told him to do this. Wallace quipped, "He did no such thing. The Holy Spirit knows I am a Christian. Some other spirit is speaking to you." A man, once in a debate with Gus Nichols, would begin to quote a Scripture, pause as though he had forgotten it and request the Spirit to recall it for him. Then he would finish it as though the Spirit had honored his request. He pulled this once too often and misquoted the supposed recall of the Scripture. Brother Nichols told the audience it was one of those seducing spirits in 1 Timothy 4:1 speaking to him – not the Holy Spirit! To some, He supports and approves whatever they desire to propagate. In the aggregate and by their own accepted premises, He is the Spirit who is filled with hopeless, hapless and helpless contradictions and endless confusion among those He supposedly guides and governs.

PROPER CONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

He is a person. In John 14-16, we have three wonderful chapters depicting much information relative to this august Spirit of truth. Personal pronouns are used relative to Him. These would be inaccurate and inappropriate if He were a glorified it, a cosmic power or an impersonal force or influence.

He is a masculine person. She and her are not used relative to Him but He, Him and Himself are employed. We do not give gender references to an influence, a cosmic power, or an it.

He is one of the Godhead Three. Acts 5:3-5 established Him as God. He and the other two of the Godhead, Jehovah and the Eternal Word (later the Incarnated Christ), are linked frequently as in Genesis 1,3,11; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 3:13-17; 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20-21; Revelation 1:4-6 and with stirring frequency in John 14-16.

He inspired the Scriptures as holy men of God were moved or borne along by Him (2 Pet. 1:21). David so attested in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 23:2). Paul so affirmed in 1 Corinthians 2:13.

He empowered people in both testaments. He did so with judges (Samson), David, the prophets, apostles, and prophets in the New Testament. Obviously, He is not making supermen today as He did with Samson in the Old Testament. Obviously, He is not inspiring men in what they say as He did Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles.

He is active in conviction, conversion and sanctification but not directly; He does it through the Word. He has inspired the marvelous means of these three acts so essential for salvation. To contend for some type of evasive, subjective, direct operation on His part today either to sinner, saint, or both is an insult to the power of His inspired and all-sufficient Word. Contending for the direct operation of the Holy Spirit is wild, reckless and lacks any semblance of objectivity. Every proponent of such decides how the Spirit operates directly upon him! There is **no** uniformity in such at all.

He is not inspiring men to write scripture today. He has already done that in perfect finality. He is not working miracles today to confirm the message of redemption. This has already been done as per Mark 16:19-20 and Hebrews 2:3-4. Miraculous confirmation of His perfect revelation has already been done and He has written *finis* on this aspect of His former work.

He is not giving modern day revelations. He has already given us the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). He has already given us that system of truth which fits us and outfits us with precious perfection (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). He has already guided selected men of the first century "into all truth" (John 16:13). Revelation 22:21 is His final Word to humanity.

He is not coming on men and women in baptismal measures as He did with apostles and Cornelius' household in Acts 2, 9, 10. By implication, we know Paul received such. Marvin Hicks once said he knew 20 million people who have received Holy Spirit baptism. Change that 20 million to an even 0, and Hicks is correct. Now some of our own misguided brethren are

climbing aboard the Oneness Holiness bandwagon and declaring full steam ahead.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND JESUS CHRIST

1. **They Were/Are Eternal Colleagues.** This is true of each member of Deity or the Divine Nature. The First Person is from everlasting to everlasting (Psa. 90:2). The Second Person is eternal as per Hebrews 13:8. Eternality is stamped upon the Third Person in Hebrews 9:14. There was never a time when the Blessed Trinity did not exist and never will there be a time when They will cease to exist. They are deathless personalities for a surety.
2. **They Were Together In Creation.** *Elohim*, in Genesis 1:1, is plurality acting in singular unison. The Holy Spirit is mentioned specifically in Genesis 1:2. The Eternal Word was Creator as per John 1:1-3,10; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:10 and Revelation 3:14.
3. **They Were Together In Old Testament Scenes.** The coming Christ is the prophetic focus of the Old Testament, and the Holy Spirit inspired the more than 300 prophecies pinpointing His coming and mission. It has long been my judgment that the Second Person in the Old Testament is the Angel of the Lord, the Angel of the Covenant, and the Angel of His Presence. He was **not** a created angel but Jehovah's Messenger on special missions. Be it recalled that the Holy Spirit inspired all these Old Testament references to Him.
4. **They Were Together In His Birth.** Moses said He would be the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15). Isaiah said He would be virgin-conceived and virgin-born (Isa. 7:14). This is **not** a dual prophecy but a straightline Messianic prophecy. There have not been two virgin conceptions and two virgin births. The Holy Spirit inspired both Moses and Isaiah to write these predictions with preciseness. Gabriel told the stunned Galilean maiden of the role the Holy Spirit would play in the soon-to-occur conception and birth of her Son. He

would not be the Son of the Holy Spirit; He would be the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

5. **They Were Together At His Baptism.** When John immersed the emerging Galilean, the Holy Spirit descended in dove-like form upon Him with the Father claiming Him as His beloved Son (Matt. 3:13-17). Isaiah 61:1 had stated, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Here we have all Three of the Godhead portrayed in one pithy pronouncement. Peter stated and Luke wrote how that He was anointed by the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:38. The late and lamented Leroy Brownlow called this the shortest and best biography ever written of our Lord.
6. **They Were Together In His Temptations.** He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). Mark has Him driven by the Spirit (Mark 1:12--ASV). Here, He won three signal victories that kept the door of Calvary open for man's redemption.
7. **They Were Together In His Personal Ministry.** Jesus proved that He cast out demons by the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28). The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was their allegation that He was in league with Satan and thus they accused Him of having an unclean spirit (Matt. 12:24ff; Mark 3:22-30). They called the Holy Spirit an unclean spirit and thus blasphemed Him. The Holy Spirit later would inspire into apostolic writing Christ's teachings during His personal ministry. Early in His ministry He laid claim to possessing a close connection with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18).
8. **They Were Together In His Death, Burial And Resurrection.** That the Third Member did not abandon Him during these crucial hours can be assumed with Scriptural safety. Of this we can be sure. Later the Holy Spirit would inspire all that is stated about these key occurrences making possible human redemption.
9. **They Were Together In The Establishment Of The Church.** Christ promised Holy baptism to the apostles prior to His return to the Palace of the Universe on holy high (Acts 1:5). **The Holy Spirit came upon the twelve**

in Acts 2, the beautiful birthday of Christ's church. The Holy Spirit was with them throughout their preaching in the book of Acts from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. He was the promised Comforter that did not abandon them. All the enemies of Calvary were impotent in impeding His work with them and through them.

10. **They Were Together In The Whole Realm Of Redemption.** By the Word He inspired He was active in conviction, conversion and sanctification throughout Acts, the epistles, and John's final book of Revelation.
11. **They Were Together In The Revelation Of Truth.** He brought all truth to them honoring what the Lord promised them in John 16:13. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would take from Him and the Father and convey it to the apostles (John 16:13-15). Acts, the epistles and Revelation are replete with such. It needs to be kept constantly in mind that the Holy Spirit is not an originator of truth; He is its revealer. Ready recognition and acceptance of this elementary truth about the Holy Spirit would quench many errors now taught about the Holy Spirit.
12. **They Have Been Together In The Preservation Of God's Word.** Jesus said it would not pass away in Matthew 24:35 and the Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to pen this declaration. The Godhead, all Three, gave it and They have not taken a hands-off policy in its precious preservation from Patmos to the present. They did not give it for puny man to come along and destroy it. Those who seek to destruct the Bible are fighting a losing battle; they cannot win against the omnipotent Jehovah, His Son and the Spirit of truth.

How thrillingly intimate has been their spiritual links from eternity onward. Never divided they have, do and will always work in unique unison!

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND JOHN 14-16

The Holy Spirit is designated as the Comforter in these powerful passages (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7). The Holy Spirit

would be **another** Comforter. This implies, and correctly, they already had one Comforter, namely Himself or the Christ. This proves that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are separate beings from each other. They are not one and the same. Jesus would prayerfully request this Comforter for them to receive. This is not a prayerful request or entreaty of an inferior to a superior which would have been the case were Jesus just a mere man. It is Deity (Christ) praying to Deity (the Father). Note the request was made to the Father--not Himself, the Holy Spirit, Mary, an ancestor or a departed saint. **Another** is significant here. It derives from *allon*--not *heteron*. The former is another of the same kind, the same essence. The latter is another of a different kind. Both Son and Spirit partake of the divine nature though distinct persons. Such refutes Oneness Holiness doctrine that contends for only **one** (Jesus) in the Godhead.

This Comforter could not be seized as He was soon to be tried, convicted, and crucified. This promised Spirit would be with them—not in them literally, personally, bodily, for they (the apostles) were still men. They were not to become God Incarnate--Deity dwelling in flesh. They did not become part God and part **man**. They were moved, motivated, and molded by the Spirit's all important and totally sufficient Word. Positions are now being taken that weaken the Word of God and make it less than all-sufficient. Its all-sufficiency has been a hallmark among churches of Christ in marked contrast with denominationalism subscribing to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. **Now** is **no** time to give up this cardinal teaching and some of us are not about to relinquish it one iota!

The Father would send the Spirit (John 14:16, 26). Jesus would send the Spirit, as per John 15:26 and 16:7. The sending would be cooperative between Father and Son. In this they would work in unique unison.

As Comforter, He would be their Helper, Aid, Counselor, Advocate, Intercessor, Teacher, and Exhorter. The Holy Spirit would teach them (the apostles) all things and give them instant recall of all Jesus had spoken to them (John 14:26). A man once told me that everything in John 14-16 applicable to apostles

equally applied to him. I told him that the apostles had been with Christ from the beginning and this did not apply to him (John 15:27). I challenged him on the instant recall promise. I quoted portions of various sayings of Jesus and requested he fill in the words I omitted. He could not do it with a single one. He did not know where to go in Matthew-John to read the partially quoted verses. I finished each one for him, told him where each was found, and reminded him that I could do it--not by instant recall--but due to my having memorized each of these. He really did not get up to bat in his arrogant claims.

The Holy Spirit would testify of Jesus (John 15:26). He would inspire them to preach Christ--not preach the Holy spirit which is Pentecostal fodder to the utter exclusion of Christ. Through apostolic agency, He would reprove or convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). He would (and did) guide them into all truth, which refutes any need or claims for modern revelations. He shall not speak of Himself or originate the message. The Holy Spirit is a revealer of truth--not its originator (John 16:13-15). He will (and did) show you things to come (John 16:13). He shall (and did) glorify Christ. He will (and did) receive of Christ what He will convey to you.

OTHER SCRIPTURES ABOUT HIS WORK

In His work of revelation, He would give them all things pertaining to life and godliness as Peter affirmed in 2 Peter 1:3. He surely was included when John 14-16 was originally tendered to them. He would give them that inspired Word which is profitable for doctrine (teaching), reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness in order that God's man may be complete or thoroughly furnished unto every good work. The Scriptures fit us and outfit us. They fit us in the rich development of character and reputation. They outfit or completely equip us in the assigned work we are to do. See 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

SOME FALSE VIEWS NOW PROPAGATED AMONG US

1. It is contended that the Holy Spirit cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit by the marvelous means of God's

Word and that such requires the **direct** operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of saints (Gal. 5:22-23). Were it not for the Scriptures, we would know **nothing** about the fruit of the Spirit. The Scriptures name them, describe them, and tell how we can be the rich recipients and practitioners of such.

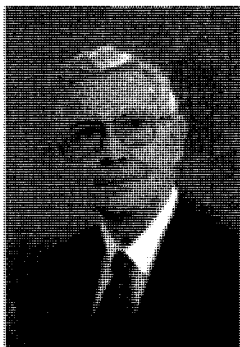
2. It is contended that the Word of God is all-powerful in conversion but impotent in the life of a Christian to the degree that the direct operation of the Spirit has to come into play. In one crystal clear and very powerful verse, Paul refutes this coming and going (Acts 20:32). He does more of the same in all his epistles dealing with sanctification. So do all the writers of the epistles in the New Testament.
3. It is contended that the Holy Spirit guides people in worship in ways they never anticipated, and hence they never know what direction He is going to lead them. Change Agents love to speak and write about this. Such is a rejection of all He has said in regard to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24).
4. It is contended that the Holy Spirit is doing for us all He did for the apostles in the early days and years of Christianity Do the proponents of such have instant recall of all Jesus said minus any previous study? Can they predict the future? Can they write inspired Scripture? Can they bind and loose as could the apostles (Matt. 16:19; 18:18)? If all this is true, why are there so many contradictions among those who claim such powers from the Holy Spirit?

CONCLUSION

Needed is a beautiful balance. We must expose these errors for what they are. We must not invade apostolic prerogatives. We must accept the all-sufficiency of the Spirit's inspired Word in conviction, conversion, and sanctification. The Holy Spirit is not man's puppet. He will not and cannot be manipulated by every whim and wish, on man's part. He is active in conviction, conversion, and sanctification but He influences through the medium of God's Word--NOT DIRECTLY.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

DAVID R. PHARR



David R. Pharr was born in 1937 in Wilkesboro, NC. He attended FHC, Rio Grande College, and SCU. He is married to Margaret Bunker Pharr, and they have four children (two sons and a grandson are preachers). Brother Pharr began his ministry in 1958 in Point Pleasant, WV, and served churches in Gallipolis, OH, Rock Hill, SC, and Clinton, TN. He was the director of ETSPM from 1988-1995 and is currently in his second tenure as minister of Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ, in Rock Hill, SC, for a total of almost 33 years. He is the editor of the *Carolina Messenger*, staff writer for *The Spiritual Sword*, and *Voice of Truth International*. He has published numerous works, including three Bible correspondence courses.

Someone said he did not believe any part of the Bible is figurative. He insisted that it all must be understood as literal. He was sincere in wanting to uphold the truthfulness of Scripture, but misguided in failing to understand that literal truth is sometimes expressed in figurative language. I asked if John's declaration about Jesus, that he is the lamb of God, means that Jesus was a small four legged animal, covered with fur!

All know that Jesus was the greatest teacher. For the most part, his story in the gospel narratives is focused on what he said, his teaching. We call him the Master Teacher, not only for the infallible truth in all that he said, but also for the effectiveness of his methods. My assignment is to consider how Jesus used figures of speech.

DEFINITION

A term is used figuratively when it is used in a way that is not according to its usual or ordinary meaning. The ordinary definition of a lamb would be something like the creature described above. But in the context of John's announcement, it is evident that something different is intended. The first rule for recognizing a figurative usage is when its literal interpretation would not make sense. If the literal proves to be absurd, or in any way inconsistent, either with other parts of the sentence or with the nature of the things discussed, we may conclude with tolerable certainty that the language is figurative. It should also be remembered that figures of speech (like symbols) do not represent themselves. They represent something that is not the same as themselves, but which have one or more similitudes.

But to say that something is figurative is not to say that it is untrue. Literal truth is often expressed in figurative language. The purpose of figures is not to conceal or confuse, but to emphasize and enhance the point being made. It must also be understood that figures cannot be interpreted to suit whatever suits one's imagination. They must be understood in keeping with the immediate context and in harmony with the rest of the Bible. People are unlikely to be troubled by the fact that Jesus is a lion in Revelation 5:5, yet the devil is a lion in 1 Peter 5:8. Contexts define the metaphors. So also, we know that proper hermeneutics demand that literally expressed concepts must control the interpretation of figures and symbols.

While works on biblical interpretation and literary analysis give numerous ways to classify figures,³ it is sufficient in this study to consider Jesus' use of simile, metaphor, and parable. Our purpose is not to dwell on fine literary distinctions. Such studies have their place, but to impress upon our thinking the powerful images of truth the Lord conveyed in his masterful use of these rhetorical devices.

JESUS USED SIMILES

A simile is a comparison with the use of some adverb of comparison, such as saying a thing is like a certain other thing. Or the word as might be employed. Jesus used a simile when he said, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him to a man that built his house upon a rock" (Matt.7:24ff). Another example, "For as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

An effective use of simile is found in Luke 7:31f. It would have been accurate to simply say that they were fickle and lacked any consistent spiritual direction, but Jesus made the rebuke both stinging and vivid when he said:

Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

Or consider how graphically hypocrisy is portrayed when Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27). The figure goes beyond the suggestion of inconsistency. One who came into contact with a corpse or skeleton was "unclean" according to the law. The enormous hypocrisy of these men corrupted and defiled all who came under their influence.

JESUS USED METAPHORS

A metaphor differs from a simile in the absence of any adverb which identifies it as a comparison. Instead one term is put for another because there is an obvious resemblance. "The simile gently says that is like it; the metaphor says it is it."⁴ The advantage of metaphors is the way they force the comparison

upon the mind. Jesus might have explained that Herod was in certain aspects of character like a fox, especially in his sneakiness and cunning. But all of this was conveyed, and powerfully so, in simply calling him "that fox!" (Luke 13:32).

Martin Luther seemed obsessed with literalness in considering Jesus' explanation of the emblems of the Lord's Supper. Lutherans have argued that Jesus was not speaking of the bread being figuratively his body, etc. (Their position of consubstantiation seems little better than Catholic transubstantiation.) We know, however, that Jesus was speaking metaphorically. Yes, he said, "This is my blood of the new testament," but in the next verse he identified it as "fruit of the vine" (Matt. 26:28f).

We may take for granted many of Jesus' metaphors because they are so familiar and we do not need to stop to analyze them. "Ye are the light of the world." "Ye are the salt of the earth." "I am the good shepherd and know my sheep"; but also, "I am the door of the sheep." "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." "I am the bread of life." "I am the vine, ye are the branches." He said that Lazarus was asleep, when he meant he was dead. He came to bring a sword. "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life" (John 6:54; et al.). "Let the dead bury the dead." "Let him take up his cross daily." "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine." Paradise is "Abraham's bosom."

Ordinarily, conscientious teachers do not want to be misunderstood. Even when we use metaphors (or quote biblical metaphors), we may feel compelled to explain. To use a figure that we have to explain probably shows that we ought not to use it. It happens, though, that Jesus used metaphors which were not immediately understood. In some cases, this was to frustrate his enemies. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The critics would continue to ridicule this based on a literal application of the words. They said, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" (v. 20; cf. Matt. 26:61). It is interesting that the disciples

themselves did not understand this until after the resurrection and that John realized that his readers might need help with it (John 2:21f).

Jesus used metaphors to challenge a person to broaden his concepts. Nicodemus was a good man, but his concepts of God's kingdom were bound to the advantages and expectations of fleshly Israel. Jesus used a powerful figure, which Nicodemus did not understand and which Jesus did not expect him to immediately understand. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...Ye must be born again" (John 3:1ff). Doubtless, Nicodemus was no less perplexed by Jesus' further explanations and we might imagine that he went away puzzled. But neither can we doubt that he mulled over these things time and time again and in time came to see it. Jesus used the figure of a birth, a new birth, to show the radical distinction between Jewish fleshly expectations and what would be the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. With this is shown the necessity for every person, Jew or Gentile, to have a new beginning in Christ (cf. 1 Pet.1:23; Titus 3:5).

The next chapter of John has Jesus conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well near Sychar. Again, he employed a metaphor which was not immediately understood. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). It is evident that this was a worldly woman, who lacked discernment regarding spiritual things. (In 2 Peter 2:12, we read about a secular and ungodly mindset which "as natural brute beasts...speak evil of the things that they understand not.") At the circumstance of his asking for literal water for his thirst, Jesus spoke of another kind of water, water invisible and unavailable by evident means. "The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?" (John 4:11). Jesus allowed, even provoked, her sarcasm in order to turn the conversation to what were her actual needs.

JESUS USED PARABLES

A parable is an extended metaphor, which may be introduced as a simile (i.e., "The kingdom of heaven is like...") The Greek word for parable occurs almost fifty times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them" (Matt. 13:34).⁵ One writer commended the parables this way:

Therefore, his parables may be likened to arrows which were aimed at man's heart, the core of his being, the place of his will and affections. Just as the entire weight and momentum of an arrow make their impact felt at one decisive point, so Jesus' parables rested their full weight upon a relentless, searching claim upon man's heart.⁶

How many parables immediately come to mind? The Parable of the Sower (or of "the Soils"); the Tares; the Mustard Seed; the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price; the Good Samaritan; the Rich Fool; the Ten Virgins; the Talents; the Pharisee and the Publican; the Lost Sheep; the Lost Coin; and the Lost Boy?

Matthew 13:10-16 explains the Lord's purpose in this teaching method.

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not

perceive: 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. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear (Matt. 13:10-16).

Our first thought about parables is that they help us to understand. Jesus intended for his followers to understand these illustrations, which were comparisons to everyday things. He was defining these truths in such a way that they might never be forgotten. Parables are effective in impressing truths which might not be fully appreciated in ordinary discourse. For example, Jesus knew that believers needed to never give up on prayer, to "pray without ceasing." It was one thing simply to say not to quit praying, but it was said better in the story of the widow who kept on begging the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). In the same chapter, to show why there should be humility in prayer and the folly of self-righteousness, he contrasted the prayers of the Pharisee and the publican. Therefore, as Professor Dungan words it, parables are effective in "embalming the truth that it might never be forgotten...[They were] not only a means of making truth to be understood, but to cause it to be remembered. Those who heard his stories of illustration never forgot them."⁷

On the other hand, parables sometimes concealed the actual message from those who were not ready to receive it. It was not "given" to them to understand because their senses were dulled and obstinate (Matt. 13:13ff).

Parables were also effective in making sure people got the point without the point being spoken directly. The Pharisees and scribes complained that he kept company with sinners. They needed a strong rebuke for their failure to know God's grace toward sinners and for their own self-righteousness and ungodly bigotry. To have spoken directly to these issues would have seemed no more than Jesus defending himself by accusing them. So he gave three great parables: the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin,

and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). There is room for fellowship with the Lord for penitent sinners, a grace which was the opposite of their attitudes. Thus, Jesus drew their picture in his portrait of the older brother. They had to see this, but could not protest without admitting that they saw it.

INTERPRETATION OF PARABLES

Parables have been popularly defined as "earthly stories with heavenly meanings." It is important to remember that Jesus used illustrations based on reality. He did not employ fables or myths. It is debated sometimes whether the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 is a parable. Jehovah's Witnesses and other materialists will argue that this is a parable and therefore has no basis in how things are in the spiritual world. Whether to call it a parable depends on definition, but it is certain that Jesus did not misrepresent reality. When he said, there was a "certain" rich man, there certainly was!

In regard to the proper hermeneutic for interpreting parables, it is helpful to see that the first of Jesus' parables, the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, were accompanied with his own explanations (Matt. 13). None will doubt that his explanations are the correct ones. With others, we do not find detailed applications as in the case of these two, though there are pointers (i.e., Luke 18:1, 9). By examining how Jesus compared the details in these two, we find a method for interpretation in those metaphors which he did not explain.

Of course, one of the questions is how much of the details are a part of the application. The way Jesus explained the parables in Matthew 13 shows that there can be both a primary or central message and additional points as they relate to that primary purpose. We see, for example, in the Parable of the Sower that God's word will have varying results with different people. Then the details about the soils illustrate the differences in men's hearts. Also, in the Wheat and Tares the central idea is that regardless of the seeming fortunes of good and bad people, God's final judgment is sure, and the two classes of humanity will be completely sorted out. But Jesus also found significance for the

field, for the sower, for the enemy, for the harvest, for the reapers, and for the fire. His explanation was complete. It is interesting, however, that some have found in this parable some things which Jesus did not find. For instance, it has been argued that it does not allow for church discipline. But Jesus was not talking about the responsibilities of the church; he was talking about the mixed character of the world (Matthew 13:38ff).

The point to be made, therefore, is that in the interpretation of parables we must look for the primary purpose. Having found that, we can determine how the details relate. In many cases, the details do not have didactic purposes, but are only coloring which finishes out the story. It is fair for expositors to suggest lessons from the details which go beyond the primary message, provided the points are not strained and that they do not contradict other precepts. Charles Hodge wrote an excellent little book, *Will God Run?*, in which he found a practical and reasonable application for every part of the Prodigal Son.⁸

But preachers only frustrate their audience when they find more points than can be easily seen. Jesus developed his analogy of the vine and branches (John 15:1ff) with significance for the vine, branches, husbandman, fruit and fruit bearing. N. B. Hardeman suggested that there must also be significance in the sap that naturally flows through the vine and that the sap is the Holy Spirit. He did no violence to the truth of the Spirit's work, but it may seem to be overreaching to build a case out of an unnamed detail.⁹ Similarly, the oil poured upon the victim's wounds by the good Samaritan has been interpreted to mean the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the wine as Christ's blood, the inn as the church, etc. Such ideas would be avoided if we go back to the lawyer's question which prompted the parable. It has nothing to do with "Who is my neighbor?"

Care must be exercised, therefore, not to find more in a parable than was intended, especially if what one thinks he has found is contrary to either Scripture or common sense. The application must not be strained. As Virkler reminds us:

[O]rthodox expositors unanimously agree that no doctrine should be grounded on a parable as its primary and only source. The rationale for this principle is that clearer passages of Scripture are always used to clarify more obscure passages, never vice versa. Parables are by nature more obscure than doctrinal passages. This doctrine should be developed from the clear prose passages of Scripture, and parable used to amplify or emphasize that doctrine.

To this he adds a caution by the renowned Trench that we are not to expect, in every place, the whole circle of Christian truth to be fully stated, and that no conclusion may be drawn from the absence of a doctrine from one passage which is clearly stated in others.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

An extended study of the ways Jesus used figures of speech would take us to how allegories differ from parables, and other such technical, yet important, distinctions such as metonymy, synecdoche, parallelism, and even hyperbole. Correct exegesis must take these things into consideration. However, we have said enough for now and will leave you with the thought that every word of Scripture is important and every truth is beautiful. And may our faith be continually enriched as we learn and even feel the simple beauty of every figure.

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the KJV.
2. Clinton Lockhart, Principles of Interpretation, (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub.), p. 157.
3. Dungan, D. R., Hermeneutics, (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co.), gives over twenty classifications.
4. Dungan, op. cit., p. 252.
5. By the usual definition, parables are not found in John. The word in John 10:6 is *paroimian*, not *parabole*, though the chapter has many of the features of a parable.

6. Ramm, Bernard L., Hermeneutics, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 38.
7. Op. Cit., p. 228.
8. Hodge, Charles B., Jr., Will God Run? (Searcy, AR: Resource Pub., 2002).
9. Hardeman, N. B., Hardeman's Tabernacle Sermons, Vol. IV, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1975), pp. 207ff.
10. Virkler, Henry A., Hermeneutics, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 170f.

ADMONITIONS TO ABIDING FAITHFULNESS

JOHN 15:1-9

WILLIAM WOODSON



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INTRODUCTION

There are times of great distress that occur in the lives of God's people. Perhaps it is a sudden illness, a tragic accident, the death of a family member or of a beloved friend, the loss of a job, a failure in one's business, a moral failure, whatever; but it comes, and often comes without warning and unbidden. What is one to do in such times?

The present reading, often termed "The Vine and the Branches," is best understood as the counsel of Christ to his eleven apostles in a time of great distress in their lives as followers of Jesus. The present study considers three dimensions of the counsel given by our Lord.

THE CONTEXT OF THE DISCOURSE

This discourse occurred during the night of the last meal Jesus shared with them before His passion – a night of great stress and concern, extending in John's account from John 13:1-33. The Jewish Passover was at hand; Jesus instructed two disciples to prepare for it. A most disturbing event was the “strife” (“contention” ASV; “dispute” RSV; NKJV; “jealous dispute” NEB) as to who would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus demonstrated the necessity of such mutual love that all jealous rivalry would be laid aside in rendering true devotion to Christ, to each other, and to the world (John 13:1ff.).

Jesus, troubled in His spirit, declared the hand of His betrayer was among them (John 13:21). Shortly, following the entrance of Satan into Judas, our Lord indicated His knowledge of the one who would betray Him, and Judas went immediately out: “and it was night” (13:30). Having proclaimed His forthcoming glorification at the behest of the Father, Jesus told Peter that where He was going he (Peter) could not “follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (13:36); further, before the crowing of the cock, Peter would deny the Lord three times (13:38).

Jesus did not want the hearts of the apostles to continue being “troubled,” as they were (John 14:1). Declaring Himself “the way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus observed that Thomas and Philip should have known God, should have known Jesus, and should have known He was going to His Father (14:5-12). Jesus then gives His promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the apostles, repeats His forthcoming departure to the Father, and observes they should rejoice this was true (14:13-28). Following this, Jesus states, “Arise, let us go hence” (14:31).

Against the backdrop of His own troubled spirit and their troubled hearts, their rivalry, and the uncertainty of the apostles, Jesus delivered the words we know as the “Vine and the Branches” – presently considered as admonitions to abiding faithfulness.

FACTS TO BE KNOWN AND REMEMBERED

In the presence of emotional upheaval, anguish of soul, or other overwhelming events, one indispensable attribute of heart is the awareness of facts one cannot deny and must not overlook or forget. So it was on this occasion. Jesus presented several facts they were to remember!

Fact One: Jesus is the true vine and His Father is the “husbandman [“vinedresser” NJKV; RSV; Phillips; “gardner” NEB]” (v 1).

Israel had once been the people who showed the love and goodness of God to the world of its day, i.e., God had planted a “vineyard in a very fruitful hill, had fenced it, gathered out stones, planted the choicest vine, built a tower, and looked that it should bring forth grapes; alas, it brought forth “wild grapes” (Isa. 5:1-3; cf. Ps. 80:8-19). Jeremiah told that God had planted a noble vine, with the right seed, and asked, “How then art thou turned unto a degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (Jer. 2:21). A bitter disappointment indeed!

Fact Two: God's Son is now the “true vine.” He is “real, genuine, authentic,” as the “vine” of God He “declared” the Father (John 1:18). No doubt can arise, no denial can succeed; Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). He can be fully trusted to do as He promised! This solid fact will not move, vanish, be overcome by any doubt or concern that has arisen or may arise in the hearts of apostles and disciples – then or now!

Fact Three: God himself, the “husbandman,” i.e., the worker in the soil in which the vine is rooted, planted the vine, cares for, nourishes, prunes, and nurtures the growth thereof. Paul observes it is God who “gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6) to those who are his “husbandry [the cultivated, spiritual ground where the church is rooted and nourished],” his “building,” and his laborers who work with him (1 Cor. 3:9).

Fact Four: The apostles, and those (changing the figure but not the thought) who are “other sheep” the Lord has who through the apostles' word will hear the voice of Christ, follow him, and become “one flock” (John 10:16), need have no doubt: God does and will provide for His own. As with Joshua, in the doing of the will of God, we may know God assures us “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Josh. 1:5). The writer of Hebrews stated the fact this way: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

Fact Five: The apostles, and those who will be won to Christ by the apostolic doctrine, have the spiritual bond with Christ set forth in the words “I am the vine, ye are the branches” (v. 5). As closely as the branches are united with and spring from the vine, so are the apostles, and disciples are united with and have their origin and life in Christ. One who is obedient to the apostolic word are “all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ,” for as many as “have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26, 27). Elsewhere, Paul expressed it this way: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

These facts are not in dispute with and for the children of God-apostles and those won by their word. However dark and frightening the night may be, however wearying and troubling may be one's longest day, the facts noted above will neither go away nor lose their stabilizing foundation-truth for the child of God! In such thinking, one can understand Paul in his exclamation: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13), a fact he explains as follows: “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

ADMONITIONS TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

Several declarations and admonitions are presented in the verses being studied. Out of many, we note the following ten:

1. Remember: Each branch has responsibilities! v 2.

2. Remember: Each branch is to bear fruit, indeed, much fruit! vv. 2, 5.
3. Remember: Each branch is clean by means of the spoken word! v. 3.
4. Remember: A branch cannot bear fruit of itself! vv. 4, 5.
5. Remember: A non-fruit bearing branch is ultimately burned! v. 6.
6. Remember: Abiding in Christ, having His words abide in oneself is linked with one's prayer being answered! v. 7.
7. Remember: God is glorified by fruit-bearing disciples! v. 8.
8. Remember: God's disciples are to remain in the love of Christ! v. 9.
9. Remember: Keeping Christ's commandments causes one to abide in his love! v. 9.
10. Remember: Christ's love of God is our model and goal! v. 9.

CONCLUSION

There are occasions when brethren are tried as by fire (1 Pet. 1:7). Perhaps no early disciples knew of such difficulty as well as ever faithful, but often impetuous, Peter. His denial of Jesus three times and his fall into hypocrisy in Antioch (John 13:38; Gal. 2:11-13) still amaze people unacquainted with strong temptation in daunting situations that it was so. Jesus, however, knew His man! The flesh was weak on occasion, but the great heart and spirit were willing. When the Lord looked upon Peter after his third denial, he remembered the word of the Lord—Ah, there is the key! Peter went out of the arena of temptation and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62).

Throughout the years, in remembering that with every difficulty, even every temptation, the Lord will make a way of escape so that we will be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13), careful reflection will hear the echoes of the verses we have often termed "The Vine and the Branches" with their tender outlay of facts of God's care, of our responsibility, and of the attendant admonitions, in whole or in part.

JESUS: OUR EXAMPLE OF OBEDIENCE

STEVEN BROWN

Steven Brown was born in Henderson, TN. He and his wife, Karen (Ulmer), have two children and have cared for a number of foster children. Brother Brown attended Oklahoma Christian College (BA), Harding Graduate School of Religion (MTh) and Ocean County College (Accounting Certificate). He has done local work in NJ at Freehold and New Egypt, where he currently serves, since graduation from HGSR in 1981. He made a mission trip to India and has spoken previously at the Ohio Valley and the ETSPM Lectureships.

The account of man in the Garden of Eden is punctuated by his disobedience to the command of God not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:17). As a consequence of his disobedience, Adam was forced out of the Garden, and the necessity for a Savior was realized. Although sacrifices of bulls and goats were initially accepted by God, this was not completely efficacious (Heb. 10:4), and there was a need for a sinless sacrifice (Heb. 4:15; 9:14). The faultless offering had to be the opposite of the sin of Adam, who had brought death to all men (1 Cor. 15:22). Adam's sin was not a sin of omission or ignorance; instead it was a deliberate act fully conscious of the prohibition of the Lord to eat the forbidden fruit. Therefore, to atone for man's conscious disobedience, God needed to provide a sacrifice of conscious obedience. This was the role of Christ, living in conscious obedience to the will of God at every juncture of his life. Mankind lost life in the Garden of Eden because of the disobedience of Adam, but Jesus came to show mankind the way of eternal life through His obedience. Jesus lived His entire life in complete obedience. "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8). His obedience was not simply death on the cross, but it was culminated at the cross, following a lifetime of conscious

obedience in every area of His life. The first recorded words of Jesus (Luke 2:49) and almost his last recorded words (John 19:28) stress His determination to obey the Father. Repeatedly, during His earthly ministry, He proclaimed His determination to obey. Jesus demonstrated obedience in every area of his life: His family life, to authorities, to His Father in heaven, and the Law. However, His obedience is particularly demonstrated through His conscious fulfillment of the various prophecies scattered throughout the Scriptures.

The obedience of Jesus is first seen in His obedience within the family. After journeying to Jerusalem with His family at the age of 12, Jesus was left by his parents and was not discovered missing until they had gone a day's journey (Luke 2:44). Three days later, Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the Temple. Jesus revealed to them His understanding of His life's purpose by saying, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house" (Luke 2:49). Following this revelation, Luke adds these words: "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them" (Luke 2:51). Obedience for Jesus, as with all of us, began in the home, as Paul states, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise)" (Eph. 6:1-2). Jesus further demonstrated His obedience in the family at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11), when His mother Mary insisted on involving Him when the wine had run out. Although Jesus expressed reluctance to become involved at this point, He yielded to his mother's wishes and performed His first miracle because of His desire not to create a scene and because of His love for His mother. One of His final acts while hanging on the cross, was a demonstration of His filial responsibility, when He remembered His duty to His mother (John 19:26-27). Instead of being absorbed and obsessed by His own agony, Jesus took care of His mother by enlisting the disciple "whom Jesus loved," the Apostle John, to care for her following His death.

The fact that Jesus had a high sense of duty to his family is a credit to His mother and father. Jesus learned obedience from the example of his parents, Joseph and Mary, who are recorded

as being obedient to the various instructions the Lord gave them concerning Mary's pregnancy (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38), the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7), fleeing to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-18), and later returning to live in Nazareth (Matt. 2:19-23). Mary and Joseph also were examples of devotion to the instructions of the Law of Moses by taking Jesus to the Temple following his birth (Luke 2:22-39; Lev. 12:1-8) and by returning to Jerusalem for the annual festivals as prescribed by the Law (Luke 2:41; Ex 23:14, 17). God did not choose parents for His Son arbitrarily. He chose parents who would set the right examples. Although they were not perfect, Jesus clearly saw in their lives the desire to obey the Lord's commands, even when it created hardships for their lives. Jesus undoubtedly learned the dramatic stories of his birth and the unusual events that followed from Mary and Joseph early in his life. He knew He was considered an illegitimate child by those in His community, and yet His father did not waver in taking Mary to be his wife and claiming Jesus as his son, as commanded by the Lord. These examples were imprinted on the young impressionable mind of Jesus and helped forge His own unwavering commitment to obedience.

Another area where Jesus demonstrated His obedience was to authority. As a Jew, He grew up in an environment that was extremely hostile to the governing Romans. This was especially true in the area of Galilee where He lived, which was a hotbed of anti-Roman sentiment. Jesus did not succumb to the prejudices and attitudes of His environment; instead He developed an attitude of complete obedience. The chief priests sent spies from the sects of the Pharisees and Herodians to question Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to the Romans (Matt. 22:16-21; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:19-25). They assumed this query would provide a trap for Jesus and afford them an accusation to prosecute him. If He opposed the tax, He would be in trouble with the Romans. If He supported the tax, He would be opposed by the common people who despised the Romans and their taxes. Jesus succinctly stated, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25), thus silencing His opponents while demonstrating the necessity of obedience to governmental authorities and yet not diminishing allegiance and obedience to God.

In Matthew 17:24-27, Jesus faced the issue of the tax instructed by Moses in Exodus 30:11-16 to be used for "the service of the tabernacle" (Ex. 30:16). Jesus engaged Peter in a discussion of whether or not kings' sons were exempt from taxes. Peter replied the sons were exempt. Jesus agreed, but then told Peter to pay the tax for the two of them so they would not cause offense. Jesus could have claimed to be exempt from the tax due to His status; however, He did not demand His right of exception but instead confirmed His obedience to the authorities. Jesus also taught His disciples to be obedient to religious authorities when he stated, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them" (Matt. 23:2-3). Jesus recognized the religious leaders of His day were far from perfect; however, He still urged His disciples to observe what the leaders taught because they were teaching the Law of God. Although their lives did not match their teachings, their teachings could not be disregarded because they were hypocrites.

After He was betrayed, Jesus stood trial before both the religious and political authorities. In both instances, He verified His will to subordinate Himself to the governing authorities. When He stood before the Sanhedrin with both the chief priests and the scribes present, Jesus was charged by the high priest to answer whether He was "the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). In keeping with His obedient will, Jesus answered the high priest, even though by doing so, He provided ammunition to His accusers, who had already decided He was guilty and worthy of death (John 11:49-51). Later, Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews" (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3). Again, not wishing to be disrespectful or disobedient, He gave Pilate an answer. In both of these instances Jesus answered in situations where a lawyer and prudence would have insisted on silence or taking the 5th Amendment. Jesus was not interested in trying to save Himself but in being an example of obedience, even in the face of difficulty.

A Jewish proverb says, "He who doesn't teach his son a trade teaches him to steal." Joseph (Matt. 13:55) and Jesus were both carpenters (Mark 6:3). Jesus was undoubtedly trained by Joseph as a carpenter and worked often with His father in the trade. As a respectful son, Jesus was obedient to His father in their work, as the Law instructed Him to be (Ex. 20:12; Deut 5:16). From time to time, tension must have erupted between father and son, working together under pressures and deadlines, yet Jesus always held His tongue and was obedient to His father in every detail. This attitude of submitting Himself to those who were over Him in work is also exemplified in the work of His ministry. Jesus is repeatedly shown as being obedient to the will of His Father in heaven. Jesus states His obedience to the Father's will in such passages as John 6:38 when he says: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Jesus echoed this same thought in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, just prior to His betrayal when He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Even the words Jesus spoke were not His own but the Father's: "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak" (John 12:49). Other passages also teach that Jesus was obedient to the work given to Him by the Father (see John 14:31; 15:10; Heb. 3:2).

In the same way that the Serpent called God's word into question in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1), so the devil challenged the word of God in his temptations of Christ following His baptism (Matt. 4:6; Luke 4:9-11). Yet Christ would have nothing to do with Satan's semantics. Jesus knew that man does not live or survive on semantics, "but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Throughout His life, Jesus was intent on following every word of God. When John proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of their sins (Mark 1:4), Jesus submitted Himself to this not because He had need of repentance or forgiveness of sins, but to be compliant to the command of God. When John sought to dissuade Him, Jesus replied that He needed to do this "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), in other words, to do what was right. It was right for Jesus to be baptized because it was commanded by God for all men to be baptized.

The entire life of Jesus was lived in compliance to the commands of God. Like His parents (Luke 2:41), Jesus is shown throughout the Gospel of John as traveling to Jerusalem for the annual feasts (John 2:13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 11:55), as commanded in Exodus 23:14, 17. Jesus was keenly aware of His mission, and at every juncture He was obedient to it. Jesus said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). He knew what He was sent to do and fulfilled his mission in every facet. Even though He had power to call legions of angels to his rescue (Matt. 26:53-54), He knew everything that would happen to Him (John 18:4). Even though He knew the one who would betray Him (John 13:18, 26-27), He maintained His fidelity to His work.

One of the interesting features of the obedience of Christ is found in two of the three times God speaks from heaven, recognizing Jesus as His Son. Following His baptism, God proclaimed Jesus His Son (Matt. 3:17) signaling His pleasure and pride when His Son obeyed the command to be baptized and began His public ministry. God again thundered from heaven after Jesus prayed, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name" (John 12:28-29). God acknowledged the humbling of Jesus to His will and again registered His heavenly joy and felicity.

Jesus declared His intention to fully comply with the Father's will when He professed: "I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31). The Hebrews author summarized the complete subservience of the will of the Savior to the Father's will, "He was faithful to Him who appointed Him" (Heb. 3:2). "Be careful to do everything I have commanded you" (Ex. 22:13; Deut. 17:10; Josh. 1:8) was the mantra under which Jesus ordered His entire life.

How and when did Jesus become aware of His role as the fulfillment of the prophecies as the promised son of David? To be fully man, His life had to be revealed to Him piece by piece as every person learns. Undoubtedly, His parents, Mary and Joseph,

related to Him the miraculous nature of His birth. These stories must have pricked His interest and shaped His study of the Scriptures early in His life. As Jesus contemplated the Scriptures, He became increasingly aware of the specific prophecies and how He was the fulfillment of them. He also became conscious of other revelations, which would require Him to make specific choices and decisions for them to be realized in Him. The prophecies were not fulfilled haphazardly; they are shown to be fulfilled by deliberate decisions of Jesus. The Savior could have chosen at any of numerous situations to ignore the prophecies and be disobedient.

The Gospels repeatedly note that Jesus knew what the prophecies said about Him. Jesus explained to His disciples, "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matt. 16:21). Jesus followed this by saying His disciples must deny themselves (16:22), which is what He had to do by submitting His will to the will of God as spoken through the Scriptures. He taught the disciples that He knew He would die (Matt. 20:18; Luke 18:31-22). The Apostle John is especially emphatic about the prescience of Jesus. John notes, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father" (John 13:1). This same recognition is given later in verse 3, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God." Other verses in John also recognize this knowledge of the Christ (John 16:19; 18:4). Following His resurrection, Jesus spoke to the men on the road to Emmaus "and beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:17). The Gospels proclaim that Jesus was in full control at all times. He knew what was supposed to happen to Him, and He submitted His life and every decision to assure that the prophecies were fulfilled in every detail, no matter how minute.

The Gospels enunciate that Jesus satisfied the prophecies spoken centuries earlier about God's chosen instrument of salvation for humanity. In reading the Gospels, one may be led to believe that these prophecies were fulfilled moment by moment,

without recognition or understanding by anyone. However, it must be remembered that the messianic prophecies were well known in the time of Jesus. One merely needs to examine the account of King Herod seeking information about the birthplace of the Savior from the chief priests and scribes (Matt. 2:4-6). John 7:42 shows the birthplace of the Savior was generally well known among the people. In all probability, many other prophecies of the Christ were also well known among the Jewish leaders; however, there was much misinterpretation of the nature of the Christ and His kingdom as evidenced by the desire of the people and even His own disciples to make him a king (Matt. 14:22-23; Mark 6:45-46; John 6:15). Salome thought Jesus was ready to establish an earthly kingdom and asked if her two sons, James and John, could have seats of power in the new realm (Matt. 20:21). Luke 19:11 explicitly states that the people around Jesus "supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately."

However, it was the awareness of Jesus of these revelations that elevates His obedience to them to astonish mankind. Repeatedly, Jesus indicated his awareness of the prophecies about Him, and His life was lived in complete conscious obedience to them. His ministry was framed by the will of God. What he taught did not come from Him, but from the Father (John 15:15; 17:8, 14). In fact, John states (15:23-25) that Jesus knew when He taught the people, He would be hated for what He told them as foretold in Psalm 35:19 and 69:4. God even ordained in Psalm 78:2 that Jesus was to teach by use of parables (Matt. 13:35). Mankind bristles at the thought of being told what to do and how to do it. This is the ancient problem Adam faced in the Garden, and Jesus was no less susceptible to these same feelings. Yet He restrained Himself at every point, did not try to second guess God, and remained obedient at all times, subjecting His will to the will of the Father.

Part of Jesus' ministry also included healing those who were sick and afflicted. This again was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:4 (Matt. 8:16-17). In fact, John explains (John 12:37-41) that Jesus healed and spoke, even though He knew He would be rejected as prophesied (Isa. 6:10; 53:1). The nature of the Savior's love for mankind is manifest by His

willingness to help when He knew His actions would be largely unappreciated and would ultimately lead to persecution and death (see John 9 & 11:47-53). As part of His healing of the leper, Jesus told the leper to “go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them” (Matt. 8:4; see also Mark 1:44 & Luke 5:14). Again, Jesus had to be alert to more than just the healing. To be obedient He not only had to heal the leper, He also had to give the leper instructions about what the Law said he had to do to be declared clean (Lev. 13:7). Jesus additionally told the leper, as He also told those in Matthew 12:15-21, not to tell anyone what had happened to him. This was to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 42:1-3. How easy little details can be forgotten, yet Jesus never allowed one to slip by. He was constantly alert and aware. Paul could easily have thought of Jesus when he said: “Be alert and sober” (1 Thess. 5:6).

One of the characteristics of the life of Christ was His devotion to prayer. The Old Testament often urges the readers to “Seek the Lord” (1 Kings 22:5; 2 Ch. 14:4; 18:4; Is. 31:1; 55:6; Hos. 10:12; Amos 5:6; Zeph. 2:3; Zech. 8:21-22). In response to this, Jesus sought the Father regularly and often in His life (Luke 5:15-16). Jesus also made it His habit to pray prior to dramatic events in His life. Jesus prayed the whole night before selecting the Apostles (Luke 6:12-13). Jesus prayed prior to Peter’s confession of Jesus being the Son of God (Luke 9:18). With His final moments of freedom before the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion Jesus spent time agonizing in prayer in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:26-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46). Jesus recognized the power of prayer, but he also wanted to be in submission to the directions of God and seek Him first (2 Chron. 18:4).

When he selected the Apostles, Jesus knew who He was selecting and that one of them would eventually betray Him. But He also was aware that Judas had to be selected so the prophecy of Psalm 41:9 could be fulfilled (John 13:18). Living with a traitor for three years had to be difficult, but even more difficult to knowingly choose him and allow him into the inner circle and even have an important office of trust within the group (John 12:6).

At the start of His ministry Jesus cleared the Temple of “those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers” (John 2:14). This was in fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 69:9. This action was not one taken lightly or easily. It quickly put Him at odds with those who were in power at the Temple, yet it was necessary to fulfill the prophecy. Jesus never shirked from an opportunity to do the will of God, no matter the danger.

When Jesus was ready to enter Jerusalem for the final time before his crucifixion He knew the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, so He paused and told two of His disciples to go and “find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me” (Matt. 21:2; see also Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30). Jesus is previously shown to be anxious to get to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34) and could have easily forgotten this little detail, yet again He demonstrated His perfect will by remembering. No detail was too small or insignificant.

Following His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas came to betray Jesus with a kiss. After He was arrested, Jesus could have easily sent legions of angels to His rescue (Matt. 26:53-54), but He resisted. He knew this would have been a violation of the Scriptures. He also knew that it was necessary for Him to speak up on behalf of the disciples so they would not also be arrested (John 18:8-9). This had to be done to fulfill the will of God, as expressed by Jesus in John 6:39 and 17:12. When faced with such dramatic events as betrayal by a trusted friend and a mob with swords, clubs, torches and lanterns, it would be excusable for one to have a moment of forgetfulness. Yet, Jesus never lost track of even one detail. These details were not trivial; they were the will of God. He spoke up for His disciples and again fulfilled the word of God.

At the cross, Jesus had His tunic and outer garment taken off Him and taken by the soldiers who gambled to see who would receive the tunic (John 19:23-25). This was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. However, for this prophecy to be fulfilled Jesus had to make sure He was wearing the proper clothing. With all Jesus was doing in the upper room, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the trial

and crucifixion, it was imperative Jesus remembered what He wore. This might seem irrelevant, however, when it comes to fulfilling the prophecies there was never anything inconsequential. Jesus had to make sure He never forgot. He did not have the luxury of a second chance. He had to get it right the first time. The destiny of mankind hinged on these details.

One of His final statements on the cross was uttered in conformity with a prophecy (Ps. 69:21) when He cried, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). The poignancy of this passage expresses the summation of the life of Christ to be obedient to the Father's will in all matters. "Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty'" (John 19:28). Everything had been accomplished, what more could be asked of Him? Just one more thing. He had to say he was thirsty. Why could it not just all be over? After all He had been through, why this? Jesus is absolutely amazing because He never quit until everything, absolutely everything, had been accomplished. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7) certainly applies to Jesus and His desire to keep the will of God.

What are the implications of the obedience of Christ to the lives of Christians today? Just as Jesus did not pick and choose where He would be obedient, neither should any Christian feel a right to be disobedient in any area of his or her life. Just as Jesus submitted Himself to those who were around Him, so His disciples are to follow His example and submit themselves to one another (Eph. 5:21), whether in their families, in the work place, to those in authority, both governmental and religious, but most importantly to the Father in heaven and His law. Hebrews 3:18-19 states that obedience is the key to eternity. The Israelites were not able to enter the Promised Land because of their disobedience. Although the Israelites were obedient in other parts of the Law (James 2:10), due to their disobedience to God at Kadesh Barnea when the ten spies brought back an evil report of the Promised Land and convinced the people to rebel against the Lord (Num. 13), God would not permit them to enter the Promised Land. God caused all those who were 20 years old and older to die during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings, except for Caleb and Joshua,

due to their disobedience. Will God be any less lenient with his servants today if they fail to follow the obedient example of Christ the Lord? "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience" (Heb. 4:11).

Another lesson gleaned from the life of Christ is that he read and studied the Scriptures, not for texts for sermons or lessons, as a group of proof texts, mere history or passages to be memorized. Rather, he saw the Scriptures as they were intended, in a very real personal manner. Jesus read the Scriptures asking, "What does this mean to me?" He was not principally searching for lessons, proof texts, or points of trivia. Christ saw the Scriptures as a personal message and mandate to Him from the Father. As He lived in conformity to the Scriptures, He saw purpose for His life and further into the mind of God. If the Scriptures are examined in a similar manner, imagine the focus and strength Christians would have in their daily lives as they live to glorify the Father in heaven! Jesus has indeed left an example that Christians should follow in His footsteps as humble, obedient servants of the Father in heaven.

SECTION II
SPECIAL STUDIES

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT DIVORCE

WINFORD CLAIBORNE

Winford Claiborne was born in Portland, TN. He received a B.A. and an M.A. from Murray State University and also attended Harding Graduate School of Religion. He has preached in MI, KY, GA, and TN and is currently the minister of West Fayetteville church of Christ. He was married to Mary Lou (deceased), and they have two sons and three grandchildren. He has edited 11 books and is the author of *Restoring God's Pattern for the Home*; *Divine Relationships*; *Silence Can Be Sinful*; *Christ: Prophet Priest and King*; and *Preaching Christ Crucified*. He has done radio work since 1947. He is currently a speaker of the International Gospel Hour, which is currently aired on about 160 stations across the U.S.

When I was a boy, growing up in Middle Tennessee, I knew of only one divorce in our entire community. That divorce was literally "the talk of the town." There was not one divorce in the congregation where I grew to adulthood. That was true of countless communities and churches across America. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, Abilene Christian College (now University) boasted that no couple that had met and married as a result of their meeting on that campus had ever divorced. No school or university could make that boast in our day. Divorce was not a topic of any great concern during the first half of the 20th century, at least not in the area of the country where I grew up. Today, however, it is one of the major social and spiritual tragedies of our nation and of the world.

In 1890, the United States government first began to keep statistics on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In that first year of that task, there were 5,000 divorces in the entire nation. I can almost hear the preachers of that generation explaining how homes in America were falling apart. That was a troubling statistic.

But marriages have been going downhill ever since. In 1976, for the first time in the history of our country, there were 1,000,000 divorces. There were 2,223,000 marriages and 1,000,000 divorces. In some jurisdictions, like Memphis (Shelby County), TN, there were more divorces than there were marriages. That was also true of some smaller communities. The beautiful mountain town of Ellijay, Georgia, also had more divorces than marriages in 1976.

The situation may have improved somewhat since 1976. There are more divorces now (approximately 1,250,000) than there were then, but the number of divorces compared to the number of marriages has dropped slightly. Some states, such as, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arizona, and Arkansas, have begun programs to establish "covenant marriages." U.S. Senator Rick Santorum outlines what those states are trying to accomplish. When couples in those states seek a marriage license, they have two options: they can obtain the no-fault divorce path, or they can choose a covenant marriage. If they choose the covenant marriage, they must agree to premarital counseling. The man and woman also have to agree to do whatever it takes, including counseling, to keep their marriage together.¹ Will this approach to marriage be an improvement over the present situation? Only time will tell.

MATTHEW 19:1-9

The Pharisees sought to tempt our Lord with a question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause" (Matt. 19:3)? Among the Jewish rabbis, there were two major schools of thought about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Hillel, the grandfather of Gamaliel, taught his disciples that a man could divorce his wife for just about any cause. In the movie, "Fiddler on the Roof," there is a scene where a rabbi is speaking to a group of men. He said to them, "If your wife burns the bread, you can divorce her." Some of the rabbis allowed a man to divorce his wife if she talked so loudly the neighbors could hear her. Shammai, another prominent Jewish rabbi, believed a man could divorce his wife with God's approval only if he found some uncleanness in her (Deut. 24:1).

The Pharisees seem to be asking Jesus which of these rabbis was teaching the truth of God's will. Jesus Christ did not answer their question with a "yes" or a "no." Instead, as was often the case in his dealings with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, Christ asked them a question: "Have you not read that he who made them at the beginning [literally, "from the beginning] made them male and female?" (Matt. 19:4). Although Christ did not mention Shammai, it is obvious that he agreed with Shammai's interpretation of the Jewish covenant. God's pattern for marriage has always been one man and one woman until death separates them. By Christ's use of the prepositional phrase "from the beginning," He was telling the Pharisees and all subsequent generations that He was returning to God's original pattern for marriage. His teaching on the topic is binding on everyone until the end of the age.

ELEMENTS OF THE DIVINE PATTERN

Christ outlines some of the elements that constitute God's pattern for marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Valid marriages must be between a male and a female – not two males or two females. When I began to preach more than 62 years ago, if someone had told me I would someday have to tell young men, "You must marry a girl," I would have thought he had lost his mind. Of course, guys marry girls, and girls marry guys! What else could they do? The situation in many countries, such as Sweden, Denmark and Canada, has changed drastically. These countries permit same-sex marriages. Sweden has fined and jailed preachers who oppose from the pulpit this ungodly arrangement. Could same-sex marriages become a reality in the United States? The Supreme Court of Massachusetts has legalized same-sex marriages in that state. It will happen in every state in the union if we do not speak up against this inexcusable evil.

Jesus Christ followed God's original pattern by urging His listeners: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife" (Matt. 19:5; Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31). Are the leaving and cleaving essential elements in God's pattern for the home? There is probably not a preacher, psychiatrist, or

psychologist anywhere who is not aware of in-law problems. Sometimes, parents have great difficulty giving up their sons and daughters in marriage. Some young people are not emotionally prepared to leave father and mother. Parents must do all within their power to get their sons and daughters ready for marriage. When their children marry, the parents must not interfere with those marriages. Leaving should not entail rebellion against parents, but a desire to establish and maintain their own families.

The word “cleave” (*proskollaomai*) means to be joined (Eph. 5:31), to cement, to stick like glue. Jesus teaches very plainly that God meant for marriages to be permanent. The Lord added: “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together [*sunezeuxen*: yoked together] let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6). The verb “joined together” is timeless aorist and means it is true everywhere, true all the time, true for all people. We must instill in the minds of our young people that marriage is not a weekend fling or a trial arrangement, but a permanent bond. Marriage is God’s idea. It did not originate from the lower animals, as evolutionists teach. Neither is it a result of man’s attempt to organize society in a reasonable manner.

The divine pattern includes what Moses and our Lord called the “one flesh” arrangement. There can be no doubt the word of God endorses and exalts the intimate relationship between a husband and his wife. The so-called “church fathers,” such as, Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine, were wrong in their view of human sexuality. Their teachings on the superiority of celibacy over marriage have destroyed thousands of lives. It makes one wonder if those men had ever read the Song of Solomon or Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Paul outlines God’s will concerning sex in the marriage relationship. The husband owes his wife sexual fulfillment, and the wife owes her husband the same (1 Cor. 7:3). The husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does (1 Cor. 7:4). They may not deny each other the sexual privilege except it is with consent (*sumphoneo*, to sound together, mutual agreement) for a time (*kairon*: specified time). And then they should come together again, lest Satan tempt them for their incontinency (*akrasian*: lack

of self-control). The right understanding of sex within marriage would go a long way toward resolving some of the difficulties many marriages face.

THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

The Pharisees continued to question our Lord. “Why did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” (Matt. 19:7). In other words, if God meant for marriage to be permanent, why did Moses “command” to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away? Mark’s record differs somewhat from Matthew’s. Jesus asked the Pharisees, “What did Moses command you?” The Pharisees responded: “Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away” (Mark 10:4). From the beginning, divorce was not a part of God’s original pattern (Matt. 19:8). Christ explained: “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8). It ought to be plain from these verses that Jesus was endorsing God’s original pattern as revealed in Genesis (1:26-27; 2:18-24). Since God’s revelation for fallen men has been completed (2 Tim. 3:16-17), his law regulating marriage, divorce, and remarriage will never be changed.

The expression, “the hardness of your hearts,” has been the occasion of much controversy, even among churches of Christ. Some argue: “Since Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of some men’s hearts, God is surely more longsuffering and merciful under the new covenant than he was under the old. After all, the New Testament is a covenant of grace. Surely God’s grace will take care of such matters.” Is that position not the very opposite of what Paul taught about grace (Rom. 5:20-6:2)? Jack Lewis comments: “Moses made a concession, but the original plan had not been such. That is, divorce is a bad custom that grows out of a degenerate people. Divorce then is not to be ‘for every cause.’”²

The Roman Catholic Church does not allow divorce for any reason—not adultery, not desertion, nor abuse. But it does permit annulments – a really ridiculous position. In her book, *Shattered*

*Faith: A Woman's Struggle to Stop the Catholic Church from Annulling Her Marriage*³, Sheila Rauch Kennedy grieves over the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic Church in its unscriptural and unscrupulous annulment of marriages. She is the wife of Congressman Joseph Kennedy⁴, to whom she had been married for 12 years and with whom she had two sons. Sheila Kennedy affirms: "An annulment is something very different from a divorce. An annulment says there was never a true marriage in the eyes of God." One of her friends told her, "It's just Catholic gobbledygook."⁵ Kennedy writes: "After a little research, I learned to my surprise that annulments are common in the United States. The American Catholic Church annually grants over 60,000 of them, three-quarters of the total granted throughout the world." One observer told her: "The United States has become the Nevada of the annulment world."⁶

Divorce is always a tragedy, but there are times when it is permissible, and probably even advisable. For example, if a husband is a philanderer, the wife probably should divorce him for the children's sake if there are children in the marriage. Children do not need to grow up with a father who is sexually promiscuous. Jesus taught, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery" (Matt. 19:9). Many modern versions (NASB, ESV, NRSV, Williams, McCord) translate the Greek *apoluse* (literally, to loose from) by the English word "divorces." All legitimate means of saving the marriage should be exhausted before divorce occurs, but sometimes divorce is unavoidable.

The little prepositional phrase, "except it be for fornication," has been debated among biblical scholars for generations. Before I discuss the meaning of the expression, I need to read these wise words of A. T. Robertson. Dr. Robertson quotes McNeile as arguing that the exception clause is contrary to the spirit of the whole context. According to McNeile, the expression must have been added when the practice of adultery had become prominent within religious circles. Dr. Robertson comments, "That in my opinion is gratuitous criticism which is unwilling to accept Matthew's report because it disagrees with one's views on the

subject of divorce.” McNeile further argued, “It cannot be supposed that Matthew wished to represent Jesus as siding with the school of Shammai.” Dr. Robertson asks, “Why not, if Shammai on this point agreed with Jesus?”⁷

The Greek term, *ei me* (except) means if, and only if. A man can divorce his wife and marry another if, and only if, she is guilty of adultery. Other uses of the Greek should make our text clear. “Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except (*ei me*) it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11). Paul asked the Romans: “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except (*ei me*) the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:7). If Jesus meant what He said in Matthew 19:9, God permits divorce and remarriage for fornication only – not for desertion, not for abuse, not for drunkenness.

Modern preachers often interpret the word “fornication” (*porneia*) to mean premarital sex. The word certainly does include premarital sex. What else could Paul have had in mind when he wrote: “Now concerning the things whereof you wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:1-2)? “Fornication” in this context has to mean premarital sex. But the word is much broader than that. Paul uses the word “fornication” when we would use the word “incest.” “It is commonly reported 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” (1 Cor. 5:1). Jude uses the word for homosexuality. “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7). Jude uses the verb *ekporneuo*, an intensified form of the word translated “fornication.” The word may mean exceeding fornication or perverted fornication. Michael Green says Jude’s use of the Greek word *ek* “may suggest...‘against nature.’”⁸ The Greek in Matthew 19:9, and in most other contexts, probably

should be translated “sexual immorality,” as the English Standard Version does.

If a man divorces his wife for reasons other than fornication and marries another, he commits adultery. The verb “commits adultery” (*moichatai*) is present tense and involves continuous action. So long as the person is in that adulterous relationship he or she continues to commit adultery. Is it legitimate to say he is living in adultery? There are preachers among churches of Christ who argue that adultery is an act. People cannot live in adultery; they commit adultery. Unfortunately, the apostle Paul did not know that. Paul listed a number of sins, including sexual immorality, and then said: “For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them” (Col. 3:5-7). If a person repeatedly commits sin – whatever the nature of that sin – he is living in sin.

The innocent party has a right to remarry, but the person who is put away for committing adultery does not have that right. Is that not also what Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:31-32?

It has been said by them of all time, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Much more can be said about these two passages – Matthew 19:1-9 and Matthew 5:21-32 – but it will have to wait for the oral lecture.

CAUSES OF DIVORCE

It is my considered judgment that the chief cause of divorce is either ignorance of what Jesus and the apostles taught, or total disregard for what they taught. Earlier generations of Americans knew more about the Bible’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage than the current generation and had

greater respect for the Bible's teaching. Too many families in our nation have neglected to teach our children and young people about this and other vital topics. I taught marriage and family courses at Freed-Hardeman University 55 times. Each semester, I always asked my classes two questions. "How many of you have ever had a course at your local congregation on mate selection, dating, the husband-wife relationship and how to be good parents?" Never more than 15% answered affirmatively. My second question was: "How many of you have ever had a class that examined the Bible's teaching on human sexuality?" The numbers who answered positively were almost negligible. Most of our young people have been taught to avoid sexual promiscuity, but they have never been taught the positive aspects of human sexuality. When our young people have been taught positively about sex, they are less likely to engage in forbidden behavior. How can we expect couples to have stable and long-lasting marriages when we have failed to give them the information they need for such marriages?

The public media – newspapers, movies, television programs and the Internet – spew out the moral values of barnyard animals. They seem to be deliberately fighting against marriage and the family. Seldom do these sources honor and exalt marriage and the family. Television programs, especially the soap operas, promote sexual immorality. Sources reveal that there is one case of adultery every 30 minutes on the soap operas; I really thought it was every 30 seconds. Sexual activity on the soap operas and on other programs almost always involves unmarried people. Seldom do movies and television programs show a husband and wife in bed together.

Thousands of our young people learn in the university that there are no absolutes, so it is not absolutely wrong to leave one's spouse and seek sexual excitement elsewhere. When I was doing graduate work at the University of Georgia, I took a course on the theory of curriculum development. There were about 20 doctoral students in the class. The professor denied the existence of any absolute values. I was the only one to object to her views. The other students probably thought I had just arrived from the 17th century or earlier. When young people encounter such teaching –

and they do on virtually every college and university campus in the United States – it is no wonder marriages do not last in our country “till death do us part.”

If any two institutions ought to work together to establish and maintain strong families, it ought to be the home and the church.⁹ It may not have been as necessary to teach on marriage, divorce, and remarriage when some of us older ones were growing up as it is today. There were not so many challenges to marriage and the family when many of us were young. As a young person, I never met anyone who thought marriage had outlived its purpose and ought to be abolished. But now the media, some academic institutions, and even some religious leaders have doubts about the value of marriages. John Shelby Spong, former bishop of the Newark, New Jersey, diocese of the Episcopal Church thinks some divorces may actually be steps to maturity. He believes churches ought to have divorce ceremonies similar to marriage ceremonies. Would to God that Spong were alone in supporting such unreasonable and unscriptural views!

DAMAGES CAUSED BY DIVORCE

Our nation suffers when marriages are weak and end in divorce. Louis Evans affirms that marriage is “everybody’s business.” “Every nation juts out into the social sea, resting upon the pilings of its individual homes. Every time a home is destroyed, the whole nation suffers thunder shock. No nation can longer endure with one-quarter of its pilings gone or damaged.”¹⁰ Louis Evans wrote the article more than 40 years ago. Can our nation survive with almost one-half of its homes gone or damaged? Stable homes make stable nations and stable churches. Does that mean that unstable homes make unstable nations and unstable churches?

THE SOLUTION

If there are to be positive changes in our homes in America, they will have to begin in our homes. Churches must have sermons, Bible classes, seminars or workshops on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We must constantly emphasize what the

word of God says about husbands, wives, parents, and children. As a society, we must do all within our power to combat what the media, our educational establishment, and liberal theology are teaching on the family. We cannot afford the destructive views that are currently being promoted to continue. But only the home can make the permanent changes our nation and the world must have. Our Lord demands that parents teach their children all they need to know, and that must include family relationships (Deut. 6:4-9; Eph. 6:4). The happiness and wellbeing of our nation depends on the stability of homes.

ENDNOTES

1. Rich Santorum, It Takes a Family: Conservatism and the Common Good (Wilmington, DE:ISI Books, 2005), pp. 79-80. Senator Santorum's book provides a wealth of material on the condition of homes in America.

2. Jack Lewis, The Gospel According to Matthew (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1976), party 2, p. 66.

3. Sheila Rauch Kennedy, Faith Shattered: A Woman's Struggle to Stop the Catholic Church from Annulling Her Marriage (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

4. Joseph Kennedy is one of the sons of the late Senator Robert Kennedy.

5. Kennedy, Op. Cit., pp. 10-11.

6. Op. Cit., p. 12.

7. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), volume 1, p. 155.

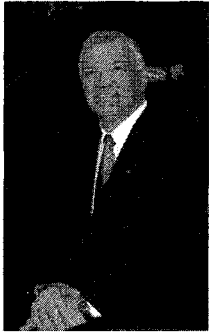
8. Michael Green, The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), p. 166 footnote 4.

9. I use the word "church" to include all religious institutions.

10. Louis Evans, "Everybody's Business," in The Marriage Affair, edited by J. Allan Peterson (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), p. 9.

WORDS FROM THE CROSS

SAM BARTRUG



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INTRODUCTION

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do...Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise...Woman, behold your Son, Behold your mother...My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me...I thirst...It is finished...Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit (Luke 23:34; 23:43; John 19:26-27; Matt. 27:46; John 19:28; 19:30; Luke 23:46).¹

Among the many wonders of the cross are the words spoken by Jesus as He hung there. We have no way of knowing if these are the only words spoken by our Savior throughout the ordeal, but these alone are enough to challenge our thinking for a lifetime. It is impossible to do justice to all seven statements of Jesus from the cross in this lecture. It would take the entire lectureship to scratch the surface of what they teach us about Jesus, about ourselves, and about God's unfailing love (John 3:16).

One author, reflecting on the progression of the statements of Jesus while on the cross, wrote the following:

The progress of the seven cries is Christ like in that they begin with his enemies and end with himself. All through his life it was others first, self last. There is therefore no preacher like the dying Jesus; no pulpit like the Cross; no congregation like those around the Cross; no sermon like the seven sayings.²

It is little more than our best guess when we try to arrange these sayings chronologically, but perhaps the way they are listed at the beginning of this article reflect that order as well as can be done. We will work on that assumption and seek to discuss them in view of what they tell us about the One who spoke them.

That Jesus spoke such words from the cross may in and of itself be unusual. It has been observed that:

It was not unusual for crucified persons to speak on the cross; but their words usually consisted of wild expressions of pain or bootless entreaties for release, curses against God or judgments on those who had inflicted their sufferings.³

It is probably impossible for us to imagine the extreme agony that our Lord was experiencing from the beginning to the end of the crucifixion ordeal. The effort that went into talking, and the agony it produced, would undoubtedly be unspeakable. Given the circumstances out of which these words originated, and in view of the love in our hearts for the one speaking them; we should ever treasure them and consider them with nothing less than the utmost of respect and reverence.

It is the conviction of this writer that these seven sayings from the cross represent in progressive fashion the ministry, the humanity and the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. With that conviction in mind, I will seek to categorize the sayings into those

three distinct groupings. A few observations about each saying will also be offered for your prayerful meditation.

WORDS REFLECTING HIS MISSION

The first three statements reflect the essence of what Jesus came to earth to do. We know from the words of Jesus Himself that his ministry was to be one of serving the needs of mankind through personal sacrifice (Matt. 20:28). It should come as no surprise to us, then, that several of his statements from the cross express an awareness of, and a concern for, the needs of those around Him.

When He said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34), we see deeply into the heart of a Savior. It is to be noted that the original language suggests that these words may have been spoken repeatedly.⁴ We have no way of knowing what the two who were crucified with Jesus were saying as their ordeal begins, but it is safe to assume that neither of them was praying on behalf of those who crucified them. That Jesus would do so reflects not only his love for his creation, but his deep commitment to the mission that brought him to earth in the first place, and the message he had so often taught to those who followed him. He who came to save (Matt. 1:21) desires forgiveness for the guilty. He who taught that we should love our enemies and pray for those who mistreat us (Matt. 5:44) modeled that personally in the midst of his undeserved suffering at the hands of men. It is comforting to know that God was willing to grant Jesus' request beginning with the first gospel sermon of Acts 2:36-38) and is still willing to do so today (Jude 3).

With the words, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43) Jesus takes his earlier request out of the realm of desire and into the realm of reality. The thief to whom these words were spoken had earlier joined in with others who were insulting and taunting Jesus (Matt. 27:44) but later expressed repentance for those actions and sought solace in Jesus. In the wake of his turn-around, Jesus comforts him with words of assurance. Where Jesus' soul goes that day is where that man's soul will also travel. We surmise that Paradise is the equivalent of Abraham's Bosom (Luke 16:22) and that Jesus,

ignoring again his own misery, is granting one more person a place among the forgiven. What a Savior we have; one who never took his eyes off his goal, and never was too busy or too miserable to be lovingly concerned for the needs of man.

Once more, his words would reflect a deep concern for mankind, but this time for one who has been an integral part of his entire life down here as he says, "Woman, behold your son, behold your mother" (John 19:26-27). There would be no way that a mother could watch her son die without a river of tears flowing from her eyes and wetting the ground below her. There would be no way the dying son could miss the heartbreak and agony etched upon her face. For a moment, the pain in his body gives way to a deeper pain, and we are reminded again that Jesus cares! What a blessing the beloved disciple was given with these words as well. He who had fled from the garden with the rest when the arrest was made (Mark 14:50) discovers that Jesus still trusts him. Not all the pain accompanying Calvary was physical! These words reveal the emotional pain Jesus felt as he sought to alleviate some of the pain he saw in his mother's eyes.

Three sayings, each focused upon the needs of others, reflect both a desire and a resolve to do what could be done to address those needs. It has been said that we die as we have lived and this was never more true than when it came to the death of the Christ. On a cross, his lifeblood flowing from his many wounds, he still thinks of others before he thinks of self.

WORDS REFLECTING HIS HUMANITY

The next two statements of Jesus reflect an aspect of his identity that is often under-appreciated. They will remind us of his humanity. We all recognize the importance of his divinity and would view it as rank infidelity to deny or ignore the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. We readily assert that Jesus was truly "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). We may, however, fail to appreciate with equal fervor his humanity. If ever we have done so, these next two sayings should awaken us to the fact that Jesus was not only as divine as his Father, but he was also as human as his mother; and that we should be glad that he was.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” (Matt. 27:46) may well be the most heart-rending of the seven sayings. Jesus had been with God from eternity (John 1:1-3) and was in constant fellowship with the Father even while here on earth; even drawing comfort from that constant fellowship in view of the coming abandonment by his disciples (John 16:32). He was guilty of nothing that would separate himself from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and was innocent of any behavior that might cause a just and holy God to turn away from him (1 Pet. 2:21-24). His taking upon himself human form, however, allowed him to live innocent as a man and thus to die as an acceptable substitute for you and me (2 Cor. 5:21). If ever I might begin to think of myself higher than I should, these words remind me that my hope of heaven rests in the fact that an innocent man died in my place and that my sins caused Jesus to sense for the one and only time in all eternity a separation from God!

It may well be in the words, “I thirst” (John 19:28) that the humanity of Jesus is driven home most forcefully, however. There is an unmistakable irony to the words. He who created every drop of water that ever existed (Col. 1:16), who promised “living water” (John 4:10), and who warned of a place where the sinful would literally beg for a single drop of water for a parched tongue (Luke 16:24) would, despite his own innocence, be forced to experience the thirst so characteristic of one who was being crucified. Jesus knows what it is like to be a man! He could be tired enough to need sleep (Mark 4:38), weary enough to require rest (John 4:6), and human enough to be tempted (Matt. 4:1-11). It provides us a certain kind of reassurance to be able to see in such words from Jesus lips as, “I thirst” his ability to understand us, be sympathetic toward us, and be our mediator before the throne of God (Heb. 2:16-18; 4:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:5).

WORDS REFLECTING HIS DIVINITY

The final two sayings of Jesus transport us into the realm of his divinity. They throw open the façade of his humanity and allow us to see more clearly the divine heart beating in his chest. It was, of course, important for Jesus to be human like we are! His humanity alone, however, could not accomplish the mission he came to fulfill and adequately meet the needs of our soul.

With the words, "It is finished," (John 19:30) we get a glimpse of divine determination. He had spoken of it before (John 12:23-32) and with undivided tenacity, he marched ever forward toward doing the Father's will (Luke 9:51; John 17:4). Most human beings are better starters than they are finishers. Our attics, garages and basements are littered with projects started and then abandoned. Our churches are full of empty seats vacated by those who promised to faithfully serve the Lord in whose name they had been baptized, but have now deserted. Our lives are strewn with constant reminders of our inability or unwillingness to see things through to the end. Jesus was a finisher! What he started was too important to leave undone. The Greek word (*tetelestai*) here rendered, "It is finished" was a very familiar word in the culture surrounding our Lord. Both Bauer⁵ and Wiersbe⁶ suggest many areas of life in which the word was used to suggest finality or accomplishment including worship (to denote the flawlessness of a sacrifice), work (to denote the completion of an assigned task), the arts (to denote the completion of a painting), business (to denote the paying off of an outstanding account) and athletics (to denote the completing of a race, etc). Whatever the background of the individual who heard these words come from Jesus' lips, they were understood! Jesus finished what he came to accomplish and now the law could be set aside to make room for the gospel (Matt. 5:17-18), mankind could escape the penalty for their sins (John 3:14), and God could now be both just and justifier (Rom. 3:21-26).

What seems to be the final saying from the cross is the childlike proclamation, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). To the Jewish ears that heard the words being spoken, it might have seemed strange that Jesus would quote part of Psalm 31:5; but to the believer who hears the words today comes a reassurance that doubts and questions (Matt. 27:46) are not necessarily fatal, that death is not the end of our existence (2 Cor. 5:1), and that God can be trusted no matter what we place in his hands (2 Tim. 1:12). I heard once that by the time of Jesus, these words from Psalm 31:5 had become part of a Jewish child's bed-time prayer (much like our own "Now I lay me down to sleep..."). I do not remember who told me that or where I heard it, but if it is true then we are reminded of the value of a simple

trusting faith. We can, like children calmed by the presence of their parents, cross over Jordan's chilling tide and into eternity knowing that our Heavenly Father awaits us over there and will take care of us. Jesus knew this to be true by his very nature; we know it to be true through his example and our faith.

CONCLUSION

It can be accurately said that the dying words of Jesus capture what the four gospels tell us about him. He came with a mission to be accomplished and never lost sight of it. He took on flesh and blood that he might achieve his goals and truly was human like we are. He retained his divinity; and though here in the flesh, he remained God.

So much more can be said about the words from the cross than time and space allows us here, but perhaps what has been said here will stimulate you to deeper study on the matter. As we close, it might be meaningful to absorb the following statement:

Last words are powerful words. Perhaps you've watched a loved one die, and heard his last words. Words of love, words of farewell, too often words of regret and remorse, all these describe the last words of parting before death. Jesus' dying words are the most powerful words of parting ever spoken, and reveal his life, his concerns, and the true nature of his character in a way they are shown nowhere else in the scriptures. In these words we truly find the meaning of the cross. Let us study with reverence the parting words of our Master...the message of the cross, the message of Jesus from Golgotha. We see Jesus for all that he is when we come to the cross, when we stand around it, when we listen to *The Sermon on the Hill*.⁷

ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.
2. Lockyer, Herbert, The Man Who Died For Me (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1979), pp. 89-90.
3. Stalker, James, The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1983), p.108.
4. Bauer, Rick, The Anatomy of Calvary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1989), p.121.
5. Bauer, Op. Cit., p. 155-157.
6. Wiersbe, Warren, Jesus' Seven Last Words (Wheaton, IL: Victor Press, 1981), pp. 59-63.
7. Bauer, Op. Cit., pp.119-120.

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT HELL

MARK 9:43-47

ALLEN WEBSTER



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A Marine in World War II led a charge up an isle with this question, "Come on men, What'd you want to do, live forever?" Yes, I do.

What lies on the other side of death? Many speculate about it. Philosophers and religious authors have made names for themselves, not to mention millions of dollars, writing about it. For instance, Betty Eadie wrote the bestseller, *Embraced by the Light*, which alleged to tell what happens immediately after death. In 1973, Eadie supposedly died after undergoing a hysterectomy and returned five hours later with the secrets of heaven revealed to her by Jesus. Did anyone believe her? The book was on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 40 weeks, including five weeks at #1. The ideas of hell and judgment are nowhere to be found in the book. Eadie says that Jesus "never wanted to do or say anything that would offend me" while she visited heaven. Indeed, Jesus seems to be relegated to the role of a happy tour

guide in heaven, not the Savior of the world who died on the cross.¹

There were only four men who ever spoke with authority concerning the other side of death: the Lord Jesus; Lazarus, who spent four days there and came back; John, who was given the Revelation; and Paul who was "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2).

Jesus, by far, told us the most about the afterlife. Others speculate; He knows. He told us of the place to which righteous people go (John 14:1-2). He made us long to go there. He told us of the place to which the wicked go. He made us fear to go there. Interestingly, He spoke of "hell" more frequently than He did of "heaven."

According to Jesus, the final and eternal abode of those who die apart from God is *Gehenna*.² This word was used by the Jews before the time of Christ. It is found twelve times in the Greek New Testament; eleven of those came from Jesus' lips. "*Gehenna*" comes from *Ge-Hinnom*, or the land of Hinnom, a valley just south of Jerusalem. The "valley of Hinnom" is mentioned in the Old Testament (Jos. 15:8; 2 Kings 12:10; Neh. 11:30) as a place where the Jews, in times of national idolatry, gave human sacrifices to pagan deities. By the time of Christ, it had become Jerusalem's garbage dump. It was a filthy, smelly place; it bred worms. That may explain why Christ referred to hell as the place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48).³

PART 1

JESUS' "EIGHTY WORDS OF TERROR FROM THE DEPTHS OF HADES" (LUKE 16:23-31)

On May 11, 1996, 110 people came face to face with the horrifying reality of death as ValuJet Flight 592 crashed into the Florida Everglades. The National Transportation and Safety Board later released the transcripts of the cockpit voice recordings of what was said just before they crashed. It is haunting to read these words from beyond the grave. One can sense the

desperation they felt in those final minutes of terror as the cabin and cockpit filled with smoke. The airline industry cannot undo what happened, but preventative steps can be taken to keep such crashes from happening again. ValuJet cut corners on maintenance. They took chances. They squeezed every bit of profit out that they could, ignoring warning after warning. ValuJet is now out of business; the industry has stricter safety standards; passengers are more careful in picking an airline.

We are about to read another transmission of a disaster-in-progress. It did not come from someone trapped in a falling plane, a sinking ship, or a burning building somewhere. These words were spoken by someone crashing into a lake and a fire. Like a "black box" from the next world, Jesus gives us a never before seen glimpse into the next world. This transcript is the world's only authenticated account of someone who spoke from beyond the grave. There are exactly eighty words.

Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame...I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

The eighty words strike absolute terror into the hearts of thinking readers. It will be the only transmission man ever receives from that place the Bible calls Hades.⁴ "God has drawn aside for a moment the veil of the invisible world and shown us what we shall all be in a little time; yes; all of us shall be banqueting in heaven, or agonizing with inexpressible anguish in hell."⁵

The words of Jesus in Luke 16 warn us to be careful to keep up the maintenance on our relationship with Him. We cannot cut corners. We cannot live as though we could never crash. This chapter also spurs us to reach our loved ones before it is too late. Like the plane crash victims, nothing can be done for those

already in Hades, but preventative steps can be taken to keep others out.

Only Luke presents Jesus' famous story of the Rich Man and Lazarus.⁶ It is primarily a story of a man who lived and died without God. The plot lines are easy to see: two men – a rich one and a poor one – lived; two men died; and, they changed places in the next life.

When the curtain rises for the first time in history on the world unseen, we see these two men living beyond the grave. The Rich Man on earth became the beggar in Hell. The beggar on earth became the Rich Man in Paradise. The poor man was attended here by dogs; in the next life he was cared for by angels. The Rich Man here fared sumptuously every day; in the next life he could not even get one drop of water. The poor man here suffered; in the next life he was comforted. "The Rich Man was more of a pauper than Lazarus had ever been. He went into eternity stripped bare of all he had possessed."⁷

We have all been caught in regrettable circumstances. We get to the game or terminal without our tickets. We get ready to pay for a meal and reach for a wallet that is not there. A teacher hands us a test that was announced the day we were out sick. A trooper asks to see a driver's license, and we explain that we have one but just not with us at the moment. *Jesus told a story about a man who ended up in the worst circumstances imaginable. He died and woke up in Hades!*

We try to limit our painful experiences as much as possible. We study for tests, put tickets and wallets where we are bound to see them before leaving, brush and floss to avoid dental procedures, eat less and exercise more to avoid unhappy trips to medical institutions, buckle up in case we are in an accident, and prepare well before presentations so we do not embarrass ourselves. We take a few less tax deductions than we might be eligible for just to be "on the safe side" with the IRS. At all costs we must prepare to avoid one situation: a termination in Hell! What would that be like? The Rich Man's experience shows what makes it such a terrible circumstance.

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNRECOGNIZED NAMES

Abraham's name is given here; Lazarus is mentioned by name four times; but the Rich Man's name is never given. In society, the Rich Man's name was doubtlessly known by everyone in the community. In eternity, though, his name was lost.⁸ Prisoners say that one of the worst parts of incarceration is never being referred to by name. All records and necessary personal interaction is done with an impersonal prisoner ID number. Some in hospitals and mental institutions have expressed similar feelings of dehumanization because their names were not used.

The poor man's name was found in the Book of Life; the Rich Man's was not. We know this because John wrote, "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire...And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the lamb's book of life" (Rev. 20:15; 21:27).

The thought of having our names written in heaven is one of the most comforting, beautiful, and consoling thoughts that can enter the mind of man. The Lord keeps "a book of remembrance...before him" of those who fear the Lord and think upon His name (Mal. 3:16). Jesus said this is a reason for rejoicing: "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:19-20; cf. Heb. 12:23).

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNOBSTRUCTED VISION

The Rich Man could see others in bliss⁹ while he was shut out (Luke 16:23; study also Rev. 14:10). Men in prison are said to spend many hopeless hours wistfully looking through the bars of confinement to the free world. Ancient prisoners were sometimes tortured by slowly starving them to death with a feast of food just beyond their reach. Hell has a similar aspect. One wrote, "If there

be one thing in hell worse than another, it will be seeing the saints in heaven. Husband, there is your wife in heaven and you are among the damned. And do you see your father? Your child is before the throne, and you accursed of God and man are in hell!"¹⁰

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNBEARABLE PAIN

According to this passage, this man in Hades could see (16:23), feel (16:24), talk (16:24), reason (16:30), and remember (16:25). Twice he used the words "*torment*" and "*agony*" and once he spoke of a "*flame*." These words speak of definite pain. *Torment* is the same word the evil spirits used for the doom they most feared (Mark 5:7). It was also used of the judgments God will send on an impenitent world (Rev. 9:5; 11:10; 20:10). One person had a dream about hell, in which she saw a picture consistent with Bible teaching. She described it:

There was nothing but desolation and hopelessness. You walk towards the gates of hell knowing that you will never again be free. I got to the gates of hell and the keeper said, "Hold it." I stood outside hell, and I saw people whose faces were twisted and tongues were thick, eyes bulging and hands split—dropping blood. I said, "Sir, please let some air in." And he said, "No air in hell." Then I said, "Kind sir, let them have a drink of water." And he said, "No water in hell." Then I said, "If that's true, let 'em die." And he said, "No death in hell." She said, "How long will they suffer?" And he said, "Forever and ever! Hell has no exit and there is no death."¹¹

Luke, the beloved physician, (Col. 4:14) is the only one who described Hades. As a doctor at that time of limited knowledge and anesthetics, he had seen pain. Notice these descriptions of hell, pointing to the fact that it is a place of unrelieved pain:

- *Gnashing of teeth*. The phrase "gnashing of teeth" is used of hell more often (seven times) than any other

besides fire (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Thayer says “gnashing” (*brugmos*) is “used to denote extreme anguish and utter despair of men consigned to eternal punishment in hell; snarling, growling: in the sense of biting.”

- Tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev. 20:10; 14:10-11);
- Everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46; Heb. 10:27-29);
- Tribulation and anguish (Rom. 2:8-9);
- No rest (Rev. 14:11).

By contrast, remember that there will be no pain in heaven (Rev. 21:4).

We do our best to euphemize unpleasant circumstances. Consider the last funeral you attended of an unbeliever – someone who had lived with no regard for spiritual things. The flowers were meticulously placed, the music was soothing, the funeral director was wearing his best sad/pleasant/understanding face, and the person with the eulogy was winsome, as he recounted the person’s accomplishments in life. Little or nothing was mentioned about life after death. Everyone carefully avoided *that* subject. Now imagine that suddenly the funeral was interrupted by the terrified voice of the deceased coming over the loud speaker system: “*Please, somebody help me! I’m on fire! I’m in torment! Help! HELP!*” Somber countenances would change instantly to horrified faces. Talk of peace and rest and “he’s in a better place” would cease. No such thing is going to happen, but if it did, it would be an accurate picture of what is really going on.¹² My friends, we dare not allow ourselves to be caught in such a terrible circumstance! In the words of Scripture, we must “give diligence to make” our “calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). Do not dally around with your salvation! Do not play games with your eternity. The stakes are too high!

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNRELENTING HOPELESSNESS

“There is nothing we can do.” Those blood-chilling words have been gently uttered in many a hospital conference room to many a stone-quiet family by many a disheartened physician (cf.

Mark 5:26; Luke 8:43). Perhaps the two saddest words in human language are: "No hope."

In their wake, our emotions run the gamut—disbelief, denial, frustration, anger, infuriation, helplessness, depression—as we try to make our peace with it. Still, we are not without comforters. We likely have some time to enjoy the relationship and say what we might not otherwise have gotten around to saying. We have friends. We have family members to love and be loved by. We can pray. We can hope for a heavenly reunion.

Jesus told of a truly hopeless, helpless, hapless man. The Rich Man in Hades desperately needed relief but could not get it.

His situation was hopeless because requests from hell are never answered. Cell phone users have become accustomed to "dead spots" and "Can-you-hear-me-nows?" There are some places where you just cannot get reception. You might be in a life and death situation, but a phone is useless if a message cannot get out. The Rich Man had hit the ultimate dead spot. His meter did not register a single bar. As far as I can tell, he has been waiting nineteen hundred eighty-three years and has not received that trickle of moisture.

Why was the Rich Man's prayer not answered? It was not because it was an unscriptural prayer. Both of his prayers were scriptural. He first prayed a supplication prayer for himself. He asked Abraham to have mercy on him and allow Lazarus to bring him some comfort (16:23-26). There was nothing wrong with making such a request. The Bible instructs us to make "supplication" to God (1 Tim. 2:1) for such things as "our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). A needy person can continue "in supplications and prayers night and day" (1 Tim. 5:5).

The Rich Man's second prayer was an intercessory petition for his brothers. He asked that Lazarus go back and talk to them about the salvation of their souls (16:27-28). Intercessory prayers for sinners usually meet with God's favor. Abraham prayed for Lot's family when they too were heading toward a fiery end (Gen. 18:23-32). Samuel "cried unto the LORD all night" for a sinner

named Saul (1 Sam. 15:11). Jeremiah “stood before God” to turn away His wrath from sinners (Jer. 18:20). Paul’s “prayer to God for Israel” was “that they might be saved” (Rom. 10:1). We are to use “all means” to save the lost, which would certainly include praying for them (1 Cor. 9:22). Samuel thought it was a sin *not* to pray for others: “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23).

It was not because it was an impossible request. On earth, many people have had similar prayers answered. They have been granted relief to pain, sometimes by the hand of someone like Lazarus (a doctor, friend, family member). God’s promise to reward one who gives a “cup of cold water” to one in need (Matt. 10:42) is the perfect parallel to this story. Others have seen those they loved dearly go through circumstances or meet with people that turned their hearts toward heaven (sometimes the timely crossing of paths with a “Lazarus,” cf. Acts 8:31; Phil. 1:5).

It was not because it lacked fervency. This was no ritualistic-now-I-lay-me-down-to-sleep petition, but a desperate-blood-sweat-and-tears-I’m-on-fire-right-now! plea. The “effectual fervent” prayer “availeth much” on earth (James 5:16), but not in hell.

Abraham gave two reasons why Lazarus could not bring the requested comfort.

1. The Rich Man had “had his reward” (Luke 16:25¹³; cf. Matt. 6:2, 5, 16). A modern way to express this is that one cannot “have his cake and eat it too.” The Rich Man had “eaten his cake” by selfishly living for the “good things” of earth. Having chosen a “cheap heaven” here, he could hardly expect to have the real heaven there (cf. Job 20:5; Luke 12:19-20; James 5:5; Rev. 18:7). Those that are “rich” (live only for this world) “have received their consolation” (Luke 6:24). The Rich Man was like those David described as having “their portion in this life” (Psa. 17:14). Paul described them as having made their “belly” (earthly

comforts) their "god" (supreme goal in life). Like the Rich Man, their "end is destruction" (Phil. 3:19).

2. Lazarus could not visit Hades because he had no way to get there. In the beginning of the story, the Rich Man and Lazarus were separated by a *gate*, but by the end of the story they are separated by a *gulf*. Lazarus could have stepped through a gate, but he could not step across a gulf. Nothing would be allowed to intrude on Lazarus' bliss. C.S. Lewis wrestled with this question in his book *The Great Divorce*: Will those in heaven be grieved by their awareness of the end of the wicked? He concluded that evil, not good, would be the victor if evil could intrude into heaven's joys. Once a person gets to Hades, there will be nothing anyone can do to help him or her.

It is interesting that the Rich Man learned to pray in hell. We think of people learning to pray as children in family devotionals, or in Vacation Bible School or Bible class, or perhaps an adult learning how to pray by hearing others in a church service, but not *in hell!* Sinners may scoff at prayer now, but there will come a time when they will pray! There are no atheists in foxholes and there are no prayer-less sinners in hell. But since hell is God-forsaken, the omnipresent God is not there to listen as one screams, begs, pleads, and sobs for mercy. Oh, the desperation of one whom God "answereth no more" (1 Sam. 28:6, 15; cf. Ezek. 20:1-3)!

Years ago, a ship rammed an S-4 submarine off the coast of Massachusetts. The sub sank immediately and the entire crew was trapped in a prison house of death. Every effort was made to rescue them but all failed. Near the end, a diver placed his ear to the submarine and heard a tapping from inside, which he recognized as Morse Code. It was a question, forming slowly: "Is...there...any...hope?" Had the Rich Man tapped this message out from Hades, the answer would have been "n...o...n...e." *His situation was hopeless because he was "afar off" from God.* Sinners are separated from God while on earth (Isa. 59:1-2; Prov. 15:29). Some are even "far off" from God now (Eph. 2:13; cf. Mark 12:34). Like the prodigal son who left his father and went into a

“far” country (Luke 15:13), sinners leave God behind when they pursue their worldly pleasures. Still, no sinner has gone so far that he cannot find God if he turns to seek Him (Luke 15:20). James wrote, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded... Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (4:8-10).

Death is a separation of the soul from the body (James 2:26). Hell is spoken of as the “second death” (Rev. 21:8; 20:6, 14). What is this second separation? The final severance of a sinner from God (2 Thes. 1:7-9; Matt. 25:32). Who separated them? God? No, they separated themselves. The chasm between the Rich Man and Lazarus was made before death. Why was Lazarus carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom? It was not because he was unfortunate, friendless, and attended in his last illness only by dogs. It was because he chose God. The Rich Man was not lost simply because he was rich. He was ruined because he did **not** choose God. Man is free to choose (Jos. 24:15) but must pay the consequences if he chooses foolishly. Everything in creation obeys God except man. God tells the rain where to fall, the wind where to blow, and the light where to shine, and they obey Him. God tells man what to do and what not to do, and man must decide whether to obey Him. If he chooses unwisely, he ends up “afar off” from God.

Because hell is afar off from God, it is spoken of as:

- A place of darkness, since God is the source of light (Matt. 25:30; 1 John 1:5);
- A place of death, since God is the source of life (Rev. 21:8; Rom. 6:23; John 5:26);
- A place of misery, since God is the source of comfort (Rev. 20:10; 2 Cor. 1:3);
- A place of separation, since God is a God of communion (2 Cor. 13:14);
- A place of separation from God and our loved ones (Matt. 25:31-46).

In contrast, heaven is a place where we will be forever with God and our loved ones.

French scientists once experimented on a murderer who had been sentenced to death. The condemned man was blindfolded, strapped to a table, and told that an artery in his arm would be severed and that he would bleed to death in a matter of minutes. The scientists made a superficial wound on his skin, not telling him how minor it was. Then they poured warm water over his arm, which he thought was blood. In only a few minutes he died because he was convinced of the hopelessness of his situation. It would be truly awful to be truly hopeless. This "Rich Man" was.

His situation was hopeless because he was in a place impossible to leave. A man put a bumper sticker on his truck that read, "Hell was full so they sent me back." He can joke about it, but the truth is that *no one ever comes back from hell*. Hell is a place of easy access (Matt. 7:13) but no exit (Luke 16:26). Entering hell is easy enough. All one has to do is sin, which all eventually do (Rom. 6:23). The only way to be forgiven of sin is through Christ (John 14:6), so if one never seeks Christ, he will end up in hell.

God is called "the God of Hope" (Rom. 15:13). Paul said, "And *now abideth* faith, *hope*, and charity ..." (1 Cor. 13:13). Faith looks back to the cross and sees Christ as the object of salvation. Love looks up to Christ in devotion. Hope looks ahead to what has been promised.

When the infidel Robert Owen visited Alexander Campbell at his house, they toured the farm and eventually came to the family burying ground ("God's little acre"). Owen said to Campbell, "There is one advantage I have over the Christian – I am not afraid to die." Campbell responded, "You say you have no fear in death; have you any hope in death?" Owen answered, "No." Then Campbell said, pointing to an ox standing near, "You are on the level of that brute. He has fed till he is satisfied, and stands in the shade whisking off the flies, and has neither hope nor fear in

death." Owen smiled, unable to deny Campbell's logic. Men made in God's image should live above the level of beasts!

They called him "No Hope Carter," and his was a tragic case. He was going through the final stages of a disease that deteriorates the brain. The doctors made the mistake of telling him that there was no known cure for his illness. From then on he begged for a ray of light, a positive word about his future. But they were unable to provide it. Gradually his mental capacity weakened, and he became more and more despondent. In his small, barred room, two weeks before he died, he paced up and down, back and forth, in absolute anguish. His eyes stared blankly and his face was drawn. Over and over, he muttered two pitiful words: *No hope! No hope!* He said nothing else, and no one could pierce the veil of darkness that enveloped him.

There may come a time when you face a hopeless situation, but that time has not yet arrived. Solomon said "with all the living there is hope" (Ecc. 9:4). If you are still alive, there is hope for you to go to heaven. If you are a sinner, then you need to get rid of your sins as soon as possible. To do so, read the Bible to learn about Jesus Christ (pick one of His biographies to get started—Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John). By the time you finish, you should have become a believer in Jesus as the Son of God (John 20:30-31). The next step is to obey God's plan of salvation as revealed in the Book of Acts. This includes repentance of sins (Acts 2:38; 3:19), confession of faith in Christ (Acts 8:37), and baptism for remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). You must continue to learn and grow spiritually (Acts 2:42; 20:32).

Then you can lose the fear of death. A few years ago, a minister preached the funeral service for Esther Peal, a God-fearing, Bible-loving, aged saint. He told of visiting in her home shortly before her death. She happily told him of her son-in-law who had invited her to visit him in Washington. She told him, "I can't. I have to stay near the cemetery." Then she added, "I went out this week and bought me a bright, shining casket. I'm so excited!" Sister Esther had the "hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2).

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNPARALLELED DESPERATION
(LUKE 16:24)

A plane plunging toward a fiery crash, a runaway train headed for a crowded depot, a car with failed brakes on a curvy mountain road, a small boat in a big storm, a broken leg high on Everest, an empty air tank far down in the ocean...all desperate situations, to be sure. All put together, they can equal what the Rich Man faced in Hades. It is hard to imagine a more desperate condition than the one this man was in. Yes, people have died horrible deaths in fire here on earth, but the key word is "died." They *died*. This man was not dying! All the agony was there without the ending of it!

He was desperate for someone to help him. He cried and said, Father *Abraham, have mercy on me*...The Rich Man had become the beggar. Considering the first of the story, he was probably not accustomed to asking for help. He had probably never been desperate before. He had lived in splendor, wearing expensive dress clothes as his daily wear and eating holiday feasts for daily lunch. His biggest worry was probably deciding what to wear when he opened his walk-in closet and what to eat when he entered his walk-in pantry. Though desperation existed just outside his front gate in the form of a beggar, he managed to keep it from spoiling his day. Now things had changed. A man can go beyond the point of God's mercy. Hell is described as being worse than death without mercy (Heb. 10:28-29).

Hell is a place where men plead for mercy; but, none is extended. Hell had not changed the Rich Man's character. He was still as self-centered as he had been before crossing over. He asked for Lazarus to be sent to him, although presumably there were others who would also like a drink. He asked for Lazarus to go to his brothers, although they were not the only ones in the world. He still viewed Lazarus as an inferior person whose role was to serve his superiors. The Rich Man was used to people waiting on him. On earth he commanded attention, service, convenience, and comfort. When he needed help, he clapped his hands or pushed the butler's bell. Things are not the same in the afterlife. When he called out, "Send Lazarus," no one jumped.

There was no “butler’s bell” to push in Hades. He could not go to the blue pages of the phone book and dial a government agency to assist him. We must not make the mistake of thinking that comfort here will insure comfort there. It will not.

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNSLAKABLE THIRST (LUKE 16:24)

The skeptic Robert Ingersoll said that, had he been there, he would have given that Rich Man some water. There is one little item Ingersoll overlooked: *he wouldn't have any to give.*

The Rich Man craved a drop of water as Lazarus had once longed for crumbs of food. One drop would not mean much here, but that is what the Rich Man lusted for. Heat on the body precipitates almost unslakeable thirst. For instance, when the body has a very high fever, patients beg for water. In contrast, in heaven people thirst no more (Rev. 7:16, 17; 22:1-2). If you are an unbeliever,

- The next time you drink a glass of cold, refreshing water, *enjoy it!* It may be the last glass of water you ever drink;
- The next time you drive over a bridge across a rippling stream, enjoy the sight of it because if you die without salvation it will be the last stream your eyes ever behold;¹⁴
- The next time you pay your water bill, think of how much you would pay for a single drop of that water in hell. If multi-millionaires had checkbooks there, they would gladly pay a million dollars per drop!

On this side of death, you can obtain ten thousand gallons of the water of God’s mercy whenever you need it. On the other side, if you die outside of Christ, there will be none—not even one drop.

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNQUENCHABLE FIRE (LUKE 16:24)

Fire is the most common Bible description of hell (Rev. 20:14-15; Matt. 13:41-42, 50; 25:41; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). There will be

firemen in hell (as there will be policemen, plumbers, and preachers), but they will not be able to do anything to put out that fire. We have no unquenchable fire here on earth (although an oil field fire can be close for a few weeks). Even burning volcanoes eventually cease spouting lava and cool to rock. The sun will eventually go out; the promised fire that is to burn up the elements will stop burning when it exhausts its fuel (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus talks of a fire in the other world that is different. The Biblical description of hell is God's way of telling us that hell is far worse than anything we have ever considered. The nearest thing to it in our vocabulary is fire. The nearest thing to it in human experience is a burn. Richard Baxter said,

Fire is evidently the only word in human language which can suggest the anguish of perdition. It is the only word in the parable of the wheat and the tares which our Lord did not interpret (Matt. 13:36-43)...The only reasonable explanation is that fire is not a symbol. It perfectly describes the reality of the eternal burnings. Is the fire spoken of literal fire? It is an accepted law of language that a figure of speech is less intense than the reality. If "fire" is merely a figurative expression, it must stand for some great reality, and if the reality is more intense than the figure, what an awful thing the punishment symbolized by fire must be.¹⁵

If hell is not filled with fire as we know fire, then it is *much worse* than fire. If fire is only the symbol of what hell is, the hell is worse than the fire that symbolizes it. Marshall Keeble once said that a man could build the hottest fire ever, remove the damned from hell, place them in the man-made fire and in ten seconds they would freeze to death! God has often used fire for divine retribution (Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:2).

Hell is pictured as:

- A "baptism" of fire (Matt. 3:11-12). Thus hell will be overwhelming. The word "baptism" means "to dip; plunge; submerge." The element (e.g., water, Holy

Spirit, fire) in which one is submerged must be determined by the context.

- A “valley” of fire (*Gehenna*, “the valley of Hinnom”). Thus hell is a place to be cast down.
- A “lake” of fire (Rev. 20:9, 10, 14, 15; 21:8). Thus hell is vast – large enough for all the ungodly to be in it at the same time.
- A “furnace” of fire (Matt. 13:42, 50). Thus hell is confining. If it were only a lake, one might stick his head and shoulders out and find some relief. But in hell, there is no relief. The bottom of hell is a scalding lake of fire. The surface of the lake is a burning oven of heat. The walls are fire – above and below, and fire all about. Hell will be enclosed with burning mountains of brass. There will be no breath of wind to pass over the sufferer’s faces.

Hell is a place of “salting” with fire. This figure is shocking to consider. The Jews used salt,¹⁶ of course, as we do (cf. Lev. 2:11, 13). Can you imagine being continuously “sprinkled” with fire, as you might dash an entrée with salt? Those who make their living welding often have burns on their wrists and necks. As they weld metal under a vehicle or roof, the sparks burn the skin along the edge of their gloves and shirt collars. In a small way, this is what hell will be like, a constant irritation of fire, tiny burns to go with the major burns of the immersion in the lake.

Hell is a place of “stinking” and “smoking” fire (Rev. 14:11; 21:8). Fire in hell is said to be polluted with brimstone¹⁷ (Rev. 21:8), which indicates that it will have a horrible smell (similar to rotten eggs). Thus all the senses will be irritated. Touch will be irritated by burns; sight will be irritated by seeing those in bliss; ears will be irritated by the screams of the damned; taste will be irritated by gnashing of teeth and lack of water; and smell will be irritated by the odor of brimstone.

To be in a smoky room is unpleasant. Many people die in house fires, not from the flames, but from smoke inhalation. Perhaps this gives insight into how hell can both be a place of fire and a place of darkness. If you kindle a fire, it will illuminate, give

light, or dispel the darkness, but even here the smoke it produces might be so thick as to cover the light of the fire.

Some have observed, too, that it is not hard to imagine that God could design a fire that did not give off light. He once created a special type of fire that did not consume (Ex. 3).¹⁸ If He could do that on earth, He could make a dark fire in hell. Man, by chemical ingenuity, has been able to create a fire which does not illuminate. If man can, surely God would not have any problem with it.

Hell is a place of “devouring” with fire (Isa. 33:14). Hebrews says: “For our God is a consuming fire” (12:29). It is the nature of fire to consume, so it is with the fire of hell; but it will never annihilate the damned. One observed, “There is no reason the torments of hell could not include physical fire, since the bodies of those present will have been recreated and made indestructible. Unlike our present bodies, those of the resurrected dead will not burn up or be extinguished.”

Some boast that they are not afraid of hell. They are sure they could endure it, maybe even enjoy it. They will just “take their chances.” To such people, I would offer these challenges:

- Strike a match, put just one finger over the flame, and hold it there in the flame until the match burns out! The pain from even so small a flame on such a small percentage of the body would be so excruciating it would force withdrawal long before the match extinguished itself within a few seconds. Think of the “whole body” being cast into hell (Matt. 5:29).
- When you get home, turn up the oven to 500 degrees. Let it heat for ten minutes, then put your head in and leave it for an hour! Consider having the whole body put into a furnace (oven) of fire (Matt. 13:42).
- Go camping, fire up the grill, or build a fire in the fireplace, and put your hand in the fire and leave it for five minutes! One preacher confessed, “Sometimes when we go fishing we set up our camping equipment and set out our lines for the night. We let the camp fire

burn down low. I've sat by the fire just to see how close I could get my hands to the coals before having to jerk them back. One might say, 'That sounds sophomoric to me.' I've done it to convince myself again that I'm in the greatest work in the world; saving people from hell which is like a burning fire!"

In comparison with a match, oven, grill, or campfire, think of the roaring flames of the inferno of hell—flames that will never cease to burn. There, the spirits of the wicked will be tormented day and night, forever and ever (Psa. 9:17).

HELL IS A PLACE OF UNFORGIVING MEMORY (LUKE 16:25)

Lazarus remembered the Rich Man, and the Rich Man remembered Lazarus. The Rich Man remembered the life he used to live. He could remember the things he received in life. He remembered his lost opportunities. He remembered his father and his house. He remembered his brothers – how many he had, their need of repentance, and how hard their hearts were to God's Law. He remembered that water cooled and what mercy was. The Rich Man may have heard John preach about hell (cf. Luke 3:7).

Memory can be a blessing. Old age is largely sustained by a diet of memory. Most of the time we live in the discursive mind: we are absorbed in the flow of events. But sometimes we live in memory, in the reflective mind: we stand above the flow to mark its meaning in direction. Statesmanship is reflective: when it is absorbed in the passing event it becomes mere politics.

Memory will intensify the joys of heaven. It will embitter the pangs of hell. Memory can be a curse. The condemned will remember every prayer prayed, every plea presented, every advantage arranged, every exhortation extended, every class conducted, and every opportunity offered.¹⁹ The most dreadful torment of the lost, in fact that which constitutes their state of torment, will be this coming to themselves, when too late for repentance.²⁰

PART 2
 JESUS TAUGHT THAT HELL IS
 A PLACE TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS

Hell is to be avoided because the omnipresent God will not be in hell.²¹ God is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-12). It is impossible to get away from God. Jonah learned that truth the hard way. But there is one place where God is not. God is not in *Gehenna*! "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ..." (Matt. 25:41). The wicked "shall be punished with everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord*, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9).

The loving father waited for the prodigal son to come home; the loving Father rushes today to meet each returning child on the road that leads from the far country. But in hell there are no roads home. The Father does not stand at the front window and look longingly down the road for the familiar figure of his second born. There is only a gulf that no man can cross (Luke 16:26), and which, evidently God Himself chooses never to traverse.

Hell is to be avoided because it is unending. Dante wrote of hell's eternal gates in *The Inferno*:

*I am the way to the city of woe.
 I am the way to a forsaken people.
 I am the way into eternal sorrow.
 Sacred justice moved my architect.*

*I was raised here by divine omnipotence,
 Primordial love and ultimate intellect.
 Only those elements time cannot wear
 Were made before me, and beyond time I stand.
 Abandon all hope ye who enter here.*²²

Many people do not want to believe that hell is eternal. *U.S. Catholic Magazine* recently asked its readers what they thought about the afterlife. The article concluded that the old "hellfire-and-brimstone" idea seems on its way out, being replaced by the idea of hell as an absence of God. One result is that people

are becoming more concerned about doing good for its own sake, and less about doing good to avoid hell. It is possible for any person to stay out of hell, but once there, it is impossible for any person to ever get out.

Erwin Lutzer observed, "Hell, more than any doctrine of the Bible, seems to be out of step with our times."²³ Though some have "cut hell out of their Bibles" (cf. Jehoiakim, Jer. 36:23), it will still meet them in judgment. C. S. Lewis said, "There is no doctrine I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this (hell), if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture, and especially, of our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom, and has the support of reason."

Men have invented doctrines that deny or limit hell. Some believe in (a) eventual restoration (a second chance), (b) purgatory (cf. Heb. 9:27) and (c) annihilation (Rev. 20:10). Each is false because it denies that hell is "eternal." Saying it is not so or refusing to believe it does not change reality.

Jesus *believed in* an everlasting hell. That is why He left the comfort and glory of heaven to live in and die in a world of suffering and shame. He left ivory palaces to be born in a smelly barn (Luke 2:7); He left gates of pearl to pass through the gates of death (Matt. 16:18); He left streets of gold for dusty byways and dirty feet (John 13); He left the singing of the angels for the cursing of men (Mark 15:29). He left eternal life to be crucified, buried, and raised. Jesus *taught about* an everlasting hell. He said hell is a place with *gates* (Matt. 16:18) to which He holds the *keys* (Rev. 1:18).

We know that hell is eternal because Jesus said that it is "everlasting." The Parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25:31-46) says that those whom the judge rejects go away into *kolasis* (punishment) *aiionios* (a final state). The phrase is balanced by the reference to *zoe aiionios* (eternal life) which is also a fixed and final state. Does the word *aionos* mean "forever" or only "of long duration?" Consider how the Bible uses the term:

- Matthew 25:46 has *everlasting* punishment and life *eternal* (cf. 2 Thes. 1:9);
- Romans 16:26 describes God as the *everlasting* God;
- Hebrews 9:14 speaks of the *eternal* Spirit.

Consider these four phrases: “everlasting punishment,” “eternal life,” “everlasting God,” and “eternal spirit.” The word translated “everlasting” and “eternal” in these passages is a form of the same Greek word, *aionios* which means “eternal, everlasting, without end, never to cease, or indeterminate as to duration.”²⁴ The only difference between the words “everlasting” and “eternal” in the English language is how they are spelled. There is not a single argument that can be made against the doctrine of an eternal hell which cannot be applied with equal force against the doctrine of an eternal heaven.

- If hell’s fires go out in a thousand years, then at the end of ten centuries heaven’s comfort will end.
- If hell’s darkness is dispelled in a million years, then at that time heaven’s light will go out.
- If hell’s screams cease in a billion years, then so will the angel’s singing in heaven.

At the moment the wicked cease to be punished in hell, at the same moment God Almighty and the Holy Spirit will go out of existence. Yet the Bible teaches that in the ages behind us there was never a time when God was not, and in the eternity ahead of us there will never *be* a time when God will not be. He has been *from* everlasting; He will be *through* everlasting (Psa. 90:1-2).

Adam Clarke comments on “eternal” in Matthew 25:46.

But some are of the opinion that this punishment shall have an end: this is as likely as that the glory of the righteous shall have an end; for the same word is used to express the duration of the punishment, *kolasin aionion*, as is used to express the duration of the state of glory: *zoen aionion*. I have seen the best things that have been written in favour of the final redemption of damned spirits; but

I never saw an answer to the argument against that doctrine, drawn from this verse, but what sound learning and criticism should be ashamed to acknowledge. The original word *aion* is certainly to be taken here in its proper grammatical sense, continued being, *aieion*, NEVER ENDING. Some have gone a middle way, and think that the wicked shall be annihilated. This, I think is contrary to the text; if they go into punishment, they continue to exist; for that which ceases to be, ceases to suffer.

We know that hell is eternal because Jesus described it as a place impossible to leave. There is a "great gulf" (Luke 16:26) between heaven and hell. "Gulf" comes from the Greek *kasma* from which we get "chasm." This chasm is described as being "great" and "fixed." "Great" carries the idea of large, impossible to bridge; "fixed" means "cemented."²⁵ Hell is a place men want to leave (Luke 16:26), but cannot. Remember that man's soul will never cease to exist, therefore if he cannot leave hell, it must last forever. Perhaps there was never a prison built on earth that could not be escaped from, but the devil's prison is absolutely inescapable (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4).

We know that hell is eternal because its fire is "unquenchable" (Matt. 3:12). Hell is a place of everlasting (Matt. 18:8, 9; 25:41, 46; Jude 7) and "unquenchable" fire (Mark²⁶ 9:43-48, used five times). The Greek word for "unquenchable" is *asbestos*, a term which denotes that which cannot be extinguished. A fire that is "unquenchable" is by definition everlasting. The worm (gnawing anguish) "dies not," which means "their punishment after death will never cease..."²⁷

The word "eternity" is found only a single time in the 1,189 chapters of the Bible²⁸ (Isa. 57:15), but all the Bible is written with that word in mind. We talk about "spending eternity," but no one can really spend eternity. We can spend money and time, but we cannot spend eternity. To spend eternity implies that it has an end. One little boy said he wished he had a piece of peppermint candy with only one end on it. That's a good definition of eternity. It has but one "end on it."

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe eternity. Think of the longest period of time you can imagine. Live every day of that span in hell and when you get to the end of it, realize that you just start over.²⁹ If hell lasted only a week, perhaps one could endure it without crying out for mercy. If hell were only a hundred years, one could say after the first day, "I have only 99 years, 364 days and I'll get out of this place." If it went on for only a thousand years, at least one could dream of the time when it would be over. After a couple days there, he could say, "Just 999,999 years, and 363 more days and I'll get out." If sinners could spend just one million years in hell and then be pardoned and spend the rest of eternity in heaven, someone might say, "I will take the pleasure of sin, suffer my time in hell, and then go to heaven" – but that is not the way it works. After one has been in hell a hundred, thousand, million, billion, trillion years, he has not less time to stay. We sing about of heaven in "Amazing Grace:"

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun!*

The same is true of the unsaved who splash down into the fiery lake. When they have been in hell ten thousand years they have "no less days" to spend there. William Secker observed, "If once you fall into hell, after millions of ages are elapsed, you will be as far from coming out as you were at going in...That which makes hell so full of horror, is that it is below all hopes; and that which makes heaven so full of splendor is that it is above all fears." Sir Francis Newport, who ridiculed Christianity, is quoted as saying on his deathbed these terrifying words:

Oh, that I was to lie a thousand years upon the fire that never is quenched, to purchase the favor of God, and be united to him again! But it is a fruitless wish. Millions and millions of years would bring me no nearer to the end of my torments than one poor hour. Oh, eternity, eternity! Forever and forever! Oh, the insufferable pains of hell!

A punishment that never ends that is a desperate situation!
How long is eternity?

Come, O my soul, thy certain ruin trace,
If thou neglect thy Savior's proffered grace;
Infinite years in torment must I spend,
Which never, never has an end.

Yea, I must dwell in torturing despair,
As many years as atoms in the air;
When these are past, as many more
As grains of sand upon the ocean floor.

When these are gone, as many yet behind
As forest leaves as shaken in the wind.
When these are o'er, as many to ensue
As blades of grass or drops of morning dew.

When all these doleful years are spent in pain,
And multiplied by myriads again,
Till Num. drown the thought, could I suppose
That then my wretched years were at a close

It would afford a hope, but O, I quiver
To think upon those dreadful words—
Forever and Forever.

How long is eternity?³⁰ Suppose the hold of a ship of 30,000 tons displacement was filled with marbles. Sailing at 25 knots an hour, and throwing out a marble ever 10,000 miles, how long before the last marble was out? A long time, but only the start of eternity. Visualize a bird visiting earth every million years and taking one grain of sand to a distant planet. In a billion years, at that rate, the bird would carry away only a handful of sand. Think how long it would take the bird to move all the beaches in the world. Imagine that after that, the bird started on the mountains and the earth's crust. By the time the bird transported the entire earth to the far-off planet, eternity would not be out of the starting gate. Strictly speaking, one cannot begin an infinite series, for a

beginning implies an end. There is no such thing as half an eternity. Suppose the earth was a solid steel ball 25,000 miles in circumference. Picture an ant walking around the equator at a pace of 1/17 of a mile an hour. How long would it take the ant to wear the earth in half? A very long time, but only the first minute of eternity. Suppose this building were made entirely of wood. How long would it take a single termite to eat this building? Suppose New York City were made of wood. How long would it take him to eat New York City? Suppose every building, house, and barn in the State of Texas were made of wood, how long would it take him to eat them? Suppose all the structures in both the "red states and blue states" were made of wood, how long would it take him to eat the country? Suppose everything in the world were made out of wood, how long would it take him to eat the world? Suppose the sun, moon, stars, Venus, Neptune, Jupiter, and all the celestial bodies were made of wood, how long would it take one termite to eat all of them? Trillions of millennia, to be sure, but only a drop in the ocean of eternity.

Hell is to be avoided because the light never goes on there. I am scared of the dark. I know, I know. A grown man ought to overcome his childish anxieties. But somehow I just cannot. To be honest, I do not sleep with a light on, not even a night light. I do not leave a lamp on when I watch a scary movie. I do not usually pay attention to things that go "bump in the night." But I am scared of "the dark"—the eternal darkness of hell. I do not want to end up in a place where the dawn never breaks and the sun never rises. I want to be able to flip a switch, or press a button, or light a candle and get some illumination. The figure of the darkness of hell intensifies as we string together the verses in the New Testament that speak of it.

Hell is a place of "darkness." Darkness³¹ is found 200 times in Scripture and "night" 312 times. One does not read far into the Bible until he comes to the word "darkness." In the beginning there was darkness (Gen. 1:2). After God created light, He separated it from the darkness (Gen. 1:3-5). There was darkness in Egypt (Ex. 10). Heaven is the city of light, but evil men – full of darkness – will not enter (Rev. 21:27; 22:5, 14-15).

Since God is light and in Him is “no darkness at all” (James 1:17; 1 John 1:5), it figures that a God-forsaken place would be a place of darkness, where there is no light at all (Matt. 25:30). In Scripture, “darkness” often symbolizes sin and “light” righteousness (1 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 5:8-11; Col. 1:13; 1 John 2:8-11). The light of the body (the eye) can be filled with darkness (Luke 11:34). Men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-20). We preach the Gospel “to open their eyes, and to turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan, unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18). “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:12).³² “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). We are called by the gospel to lead us out of darkness into the light (1 Pet. 2:9). Since hell is a place of absolute wickedness, it is a place of absolute darkness. In hell, morning never comes, and the light never goes on. There are no switches to flip or bulbs to change. One is isolated, restricted, totally and forever to himself/herself.

This figure alone is enough to make us want to avoid hell. Most people do not enjoy darkness in this life. One out of three people are afraid to walk outside their homes after dark.³³ Why is it so much harder for an elderly person to suffer through the long hours of the night than the day time hours? Why is a child tearfully afraid of sounds in the night, but hardly notices them at all in the day? “Darkness” was a plague for Pharaoh (Ex. 10:21-22). God could have just as easily made a “plague of light” and removed darkness for three days, but that would not have been dreaded. But continual darkness for seventy-two hours was punishment. Let us dread the consequences of sin; if three days of darkness were so dreadful, what will *everlasting* darkness be?

Hell is not simply “darkness,” but it is the “mist of darkness.” Peter wrote, “to whom³⁴ the *mist of darkness* is reserved³⁵ for ever” (2 Pet. 2:17). This figure is found nowhere else in the New Testament³⁶ and suggests an uncomfortable, eerie fog —what Bengel calls “the chilling horror accompanying darkness.”³⁷ Barnes notes that “the word rendered ‘mist’ here³⁸ means properly muskiness, thick gloom, darkness; and the phrase

'mist of darkness' is designed to denote 'intense' darkness, or the thickest darkness." This reminds us of the darkness of the ninth Egyptian plague that could be "felt"³⁹ (Ex. 10:21).

It is not only "mist of darkness," but is "*blackness of darkness.*" Jude wrote, "to whom is reserved the *blackness of darkness* for ever" (Jude 13). This could be translated "the blackest darkness." Perhaps you have been deep in a cave such as Desoto Caverns, Ruby Falls, or Mammoth Caves when the tour guide turned out the light. You literally could not see your hand in front of your face. Take the *Frauenmauerhöhle* for instance. This is a 640 meter long passage leading through a mountain in the Austrian Alps. It has several rooms and passages on both sides, one of the most interesting is the ice chamber just a few steps from the west entrance left side. A group of three tourists with poor light once became trapped in the cave. When the light went out they followed the cave wall to get out of the cave. This is normally a good idea, but this cave is a circle passage. It makes a complete turn, and following the inner wall means that you make circles indefinitely. If they had switched to the opposite wall when they did not reach the exit after some time, they could have gotten out, but since they could not see, they did not notice that they were repeatedly retracing their steps.

Hell is the devil's *Frauenmauerhöhle*. You go around in circles in the dark forever. Hell will be as dark as a cave and darker. It is *utter darkness*; darkness in the extremity; the highest degree of darkness, without any remainder, or hope of light; not the least gleam or glimpse of it. It is the region of darkness; darkness that results from being completely shut out of heaven, the land of light.⁴⁰ The Jews believe that the Egyptian darkness (Ex. 10) came from the darkness of hell, and that in hell the wicked will be covered with the darkness which was upon the face of the deep at the creation (Gen. 1:2).⁴¹ "Darkness has its birth there: there are its seeds and buds, there it vegetates everlastingly, and its eternal fruit is—darkness!"⁴² In hell there is fire, but no light.

It is not only the "blackness of darkness;" it is "*outer darkness.*" Matthew recorded: "And cast ye the unprofitable

servant into *outer darkness*:⁴³ there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30; cf. 8:12; 22:13). This suggests that hell is the place farthest removed from the source of light. The Bible could have just said “darkness” and that would have been frightening enough, but for some reason the Holy Spirit chose to modify it with “outer.”

This figure is illustrated by the universe. Robertson explains that it is a “comparative adjective like our ‘further out,’ the darkness outside the limits of the lighted palace.” That indicates great separation. It is similar to how we use the phrase “outer space.” There is “space”—where rockets go and telescopes can see—and then there is “outer space”—where we never visit and know little about. Interestingly, in outer space there are “black holes.”⁴⁴ It is believed that stars appreciably larger than the Sun, once they have exhausted all their nuclear fuel, collapse to form black holes. They are “black” because no light escapes their intense gravity.⁴⁵ Some astronomers believe that enormously massive black holes exist in the center of our and other galaxies. Hell is God’s “black hole.” It is God’s “outer space.” It is far, far away. It is a place unseen by any telescope; NASA has never caught a glimpse of it.

This figure is illustrated by a Jewish wedding. Jesus represented heaven as a Jewish wedding festival which were normally held at night (Matt. 8:12). Banquets were traditionally held at a house of reception filled with lights—torches, lamps, candles, and lanterns. Those who were admitted thus had an abundance of light. We take bright lights at night for granted, but in those days with no electricity or incandescent bulbs, they valued bright light very much. Those who were shut out of the feast were in “outer darkness.” It was “outer” because it was outside the house in which the guests were⁴⁶ and appeared the gloomier because it was contrasted with the bright light inside the house. To be “outside” (or, “*without*” the heavenly city, Rev. 22:15) was to be excluded from the “joyous nuptials and gladsome festivities” of the marriage feast of the Lamb. This would be sad enough by itself, but to find ourselves not only excluded from the brightness and glory and joy of the heavenly party, but cast into a

region of darkness, with all its horrors, is indescribably worse. There is absolute chaos and confusion, hopelessness and futility.

This figure is illustrated by an ancient prison. Peter wrote, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into *chains of darkness*, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2:4). Barnes comments:

It is not improbable that the image was taken from Roman dungeons or prisons. They were commonly constructed underground. They were shut out from the light of the sun. They were, of course, damp, dark, and unhealthy, and probably most filthy. Masters were in the habit of constructing such prisons for their slaves, where the unhappy prisoner, without light, or company, or comfort, spent his days and nights in weeping from grief, and in vainly gnashing his teeth from indignation. The image expresses the fact that the wicked who are lost will be shut out from the light of heaven, and from peace, and joy, and hope; will weep in hopeless grief, and will gnash their teeth in indignation against God, and complain against his justice. What a striking image of future woe! Go to a damp, dark, solitary, and squalid dungeon; see a miserable and enraged victim; add to his sufferings the idea of eternity, and then remember that this, after all, is but an image, a faint image, of hell!

Jesus defeated "the dark side." Luke records a fact not mentioned by the other biographers. In Gethsemane, Jesus said to the man who came to arrest Him, "This is your hour, and the **power of darkness**" (Luke 22:53). Jesus' death was the time when His enemies – both Satan and the Jews – were allowed to do their worst. They gave their all to extinguish the Light of the world (John 8:12), the One who was the "true Light...which lighteth every man, coming into the world" (John 1:9). To vanquish the prince of this world and the rulers of the darkness of this world, Jesus had to fight on their home field – to walk in darkness and

have no light (cf. Isa. 50:10). He gave them all the advantage they could have against Him, to make His victory more impressive.

There was darkness at the crucifixion of Jesus the Christ for three hours (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33), as there was darkness in Egypt for three days. Luke says "the sun was darkened" (Luke 23:45). Christ was the light of the world, but that light was extinguished until the ninth hour. The darkness in Egypt was the ninth plague. The light of Christ was rekindled at His resurrection. Jesus walked in darkness for three hours that we might not have to walk in darkness forever. He defeated the power of darkness to deliver us from the presence of darkness.

As Paul's sailing companions once cast their anchors and "wished for the day" (Acts 27:29), so those sailing on the Lake of Fire will spend an eternity "wishing for the day" that will never come. If there were not another description in all the Bible of hell this would be enough to convince me that I do not want to go there. *I am scared of the dark.*

CONCLUSION

One day, when Vice President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, a Senator angrily told another to go "straight to hell." The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as presiding officer, and Coolidge looked up from the book he had been leafing through while listening to the debate. "I've been looking through the rule book," he said, "You don't have to go."⁴⁷

The Rich Man did not have to go to hell, either. No one on earth has to go there. God wants all men to be saved and to come unto a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). The most wonderful news is that Christ came into the world to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He calls us to come unto Him (Matt. 11:28). If we respond, He administers the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

The Rich Man could have received ten million gallons of the water of God's mercy in this life, but he neglected his opportunity and wound up in torment without a drop. The key

words are “*in thy lifetime*” (Luke 16:25). “*During your life*” is all the time we get. If we squander this time, it will be too late afterward to change the result.

With this most terrifying of all words—hell—still trembling on our lips, we exhort and entreat, we persuade and plead (2 Cor. 5:11). We must not interpret God’s goodness toward us today as an indicator that He accepts us. Paul wrote, “despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). When the sinner has spent a billion years, a billion times over, he has not one less second to spend in the infernal realm. The wretchedness of that state no tongue can exaggerate; it defies exaggeration.

If we end up in Hades, it will be too late to repent! If you are not a Christian, do not wait! Do not risk an eternity of torment for the sake of a few years of pleasure. Be reconciled to God today!

ENDNOTES

1. Richard Abanes, in *Christianity Today*, March 7, 1994, p. 53

2. Wayne Jackson (www.christiancourier.com/archives/ntHell.htm) points out that the term “hell” is found twenty-three times in the King James Version of the English Bible. There is much confusion among religious people regarding this word due to the fact that the English form “hell” actually represents three different terms in the Greek New Testament.

- “Hades” is used 11 times (“unseen”); *Hades* describes the place of the unrighteous between death and judgment. The Hebrew *Sheol* becomes *Hades* in Greek. If hell is the permanent prison of the damned, then Hades is the temporary jail, and the suffering in both is very real.
- “Tartaros,” used only once (2 Pet. 2:4), describes the place fallen angels are confined before they face judgment (cf. Jude 6-7).
- “*Gehenna*,” used twelve times, describes the final place of the unrighteous after judgment; it is the Aramaic form of Hebrew Gehinnom and refers to the Valley of Hinnom which is used as a metaphor for the eternal place of punishment.

3. Wayne Jackson, www.christiancourier.com/archives/ntHell.htm

4. For careful students, let me say that we will make no distinction between Hades (the temporary abode of the unbelieving dead) and Hell (the "Lake of Fire," the final destination of the unbelieving dead.) There is a difference, but I see little need to distinguish between them here since after the judgment, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). Both are places of fire and torment, and there is no escape from either.

5. Simeon, source unknown

6. Some think it a made-up story; others that it is an account of an historical event. If it is fictional, it truthfully teaches what will happen to real people. Most conservative scholars believe that it is an actual account of what happened to two men. J. Vernon McGee pointed out, "The Lord would not have given the name of someone who did not exist." John G. Butler pointed out that the word "certain" before "Rich Man" (Luke 16:19) and before "beggar" (Luke 16:20) points to a historical description rather than a fictional story. The prodigal son parable also had a "certain" in it (Luke 15:11) and can be cited as another real life story used as a parable by our Lord. In Jesus' last conversation with the disciples before He went to this Hadean world, He gave insight into how He taught. He said, "... If it were not so I would have told you" (John 14:1-3), which means, "I would not allow you to believe what is false" (John G. Butler, JESUS CHRIST His Parables, Studies of the Savior, 3, LBC Publications, Clinton, IA., First printing 2002, Second printing 2004, pp. 583-595).

7. Lockyer, Herbert W. All the Parables of the Bible, # 0310281113BT, Zondervan

8. He is often referred to as "Dives" in commentaries. "Dives" in the word the Latin Vulgate used to translate "rich" in this passage.

9. Lazarus was in "*Abraham's bosom ...*" Matt. Henry wrote, "The Jews expressed the happiness of the righteous at death three ways: they go to the Garden of Eden; they go to be under the throne of glory; and they go to the bosom of Abraham." "Paradise" (Luke 23:43) is another name for the good part of Hades. (Matthew Henry, MATTHEW HENRY'S COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE, Vol. 5, Matthew to John, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, First Printing March, 1991).

10. Charles Spurgeon, Miracles and Parables of Our Lord, ISBN: 0801082919, Baker, 1988

11. Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee.

12. Dave Redick, The Preacher's Study, <http://preacherstudy.com/ezone19.htm>.

13. Abraham's reply (16:25) does not teach that eternity is always an exact reversal of a person's lot on earth. Often it is the case that riches stymie interest in spiritual things, but not always. The very Abraham the

Rich Man was addressing was rich while on earth (Gen. 13:2). But this Rich Man was like those Job talked about who lived for this world and did not want God in their lives: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:13-14).

14. Adapted from Oliver B. Greene, HELL (The Gospel Hour, Inc., Greenville, SC), p. 72

15. William E. Evans (1870-1950), The Great Doctrines of the Bible, # 0802430961, Moody, p. 262

16. They were not allowed to put leaven or honey on their sacrifices, but they were required to use salt.

17. "A hard, brittle, inflammable substance, of a lemon yellow color, which has no smell, unless heated, and which becomes negatively electric by heat and friction. It is found, in great quantities, and sometimes pure, in the neighborhood of volcanoes. It is an ingredient in a variety of minerals and ores. The sulphur of commerce is procured from its natural beds, or artificially extracted from pyrites."

18. Admitted, the miracle could have been performed on the bush instead of the fire, but either way God did something out of the ordinary.

19. Wendell Winkler, Studying Sin Seriously, Winkler Publications, Northport, Alabama

20. H. Alford, The N.T. for English Readers, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, p. 395

21. When the Psalmist says that "if he makes his bed in hell, thou art there" he refers not to the final end of the wicked, but to "sheol," the grave and the place of departed spirits. Strong defines it as "*hades* or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*), including its accessories and inmates: grave, hell, pit."

22. Canto 3.1-9, from The Inferno by Dante Alighieri, ISBN: 0140867384, Pinsky, Robert (Translator), 1/1/1998, Penguin Audiobooks.

23. Erwin W. Lutzer, One Minute After You Die, (Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1997), pp.97-116

24. Wendell Winkler provides this additional research: "The Greek words for "eternal" and "everlasting" are *aion* and *ainois*. They are from the Greek *aei* "always" and *oon* "being"; therefore mean "always being." *Aion* is used in respect to future punishment in 2 Pet. 2:17, Jude 1:13, and Rev. 14:11; 19:3; 20:10. *Aionios* is used relative to future punishment in Matt. 18:8; 25:41, 46; Mark 3:29, 2 Thes. 1:9, Heb. 6:2, and Jude 6. *Aion* is applied to the happiness of the righteous in Matt. 25:46. *Aionios* is applied to God in Rom. 16:26 and to the Holy Spirit in Heb. 9:14. *Deduction*: If the Scriptures do not assert endless punishment for the wicked, neither do they assert endless happiness for the righteous nor the endless glory and existence of the Godhead" (Wendell

Winkler, Studying Sin Seriously, Winkler Publications, Northport, AL, 1976).

25. If this is true of Hades, it must also be true of hell. J. W.

McGarvey reasoned, "If the intermediate condition of things is fixed and established, the final condition must, afortiani be more so."

26. Mark was written primarily to the Romans, thus he defines the Hebrew word "*Gehenna*" by telling them it means "the unquenchable fire."

27. Thayer, 580

28. The word *eternal* is found 47 times.

29. Jimmy Allen, *What is Hell Like? And Other Sermons*, Christian Publishing Co., Ft. Worth, TX. 1965

30. These illustrations are adapted from Jimmy Allen, *What is Hell Like? And Other Sermons*, Christian Publishing Co., Ft. Worth, TX. 1965

31. Including darkness, darken, darkened, darkly.

32. For a description of the "armour of light," see Eph. 6:13-17. "The day is at hand" means the same as 2 Cor. 6:2 – "today is the day of salvation."

33. Gallup has followed this question for a long time. They ask, "Is there any area near where you live—that is, within a mile—where you would be afraid to walk alone at night?" About one in three Americans (32%) say yes. Since Gallup started asking this question in 1965, results have ranged from 30% in 2001 (about a month after the September 11 terrorist attacks) to 48% in the early 1980s. Americans who are most likely to answer this question affirmatively include those living in urban areas (49%), those earning less than \$30,000 per year (48%), women (43%), nonwhites (42%), and those aged 65 and older (42%).

34. Matthew Henry observes of the false teachers to whom this threat was originally made: "... as clouds obstruct the light of the sun, and darken the air, so do these darken counsel by words without knowledge and wherein there is no truth; and, seeing these men are for promoting darkness in this world, it is very just that the mist of darkness should be their portion in the next."

35. Albert Barnes notes: "When it is said that this is 'reserved' for them, it means that it is prepared for them, or is kept in a state of readiness to receive them. It is like a jail or penitentiary which is built in anticipation that there will be criminals, and with the expectation that there will be a need for it. So God has constructed the great prison-house of the universe, the world where the wicked are to dwell, with the knowledge that there would be occasion for it; and so He keeps it from age to age that it may be ready to receive the wicked when the sentence of condemnation shall be passed upon them" (Albert Barnes, Barnes' Notes, The Gospels. Baker Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, *Edited by Robert Frew*, Reprinted 1983).

36. Robertson's Word Pictures points out the word is not found elsewhere in the New Testament.

37. Quoted by JFB.

38. *zophos*

39. A primitive root; to *feel* of; by implication to *grope*: feel, grope, search" (Strong's). It is translated "grope," 3 times, "felt," 2 times, and "searched," 2 times, and "gropeth," and "feel" once each in the KJV.

40. Matthew Henry

41. Shemot Rabba, sect. 14. fol. 99. 3

42. See Zend Avesta, vol. i. Vendidad sadi, Fargard. xviii. p. 412 (quoted by Barnes).

43. Vincent's Word Studies says, "The Greek order of words is very forcible. 'They shall be cast forth into the darkness, *the outer* (darkness).'"

44. Black holes are extremely compact objects, collapsed by gravity which have overcome electric and nuclear forces.

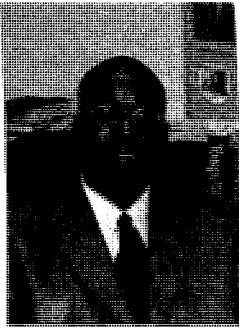
45. Material attracted to a black hole, though, gains enormous energy and can radiate part of it before being swallowed up.

46. The expression is emphatic—"the darkness which is outside."

47. Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Definitions

EMOTIONS OF JESUS

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INTRODUCTION

Let us paint a portrait of Jesus and His emotions. Jesus felt compassion. He was angry; He became indignant; He had zeal; He was troubled; He was greatly distressed; He was sorrowful; He was deeply moved; He grieved; He sighed; He wept; He groaned. Jesus was in agony. He was surprised; He was amazed; He rejoiced; He had joy. Jesus loved.

If we could define emotions, we would say they are feelings; feelings need to be expressed.

It is God's eternal purpose that we all will become in the image of His dear son. However, as we strive to become like Jesus, we sometimes overlook his emotions. Jesus and His emotions reflect the image of God. When we compare our emotional lives to His, we become aware of our need for transformation. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says, "But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as

from the Lord, the Spirit.” Paul tells us that as we intently look to Jesus and look at His life and His example, we are transformed in the same image. Paul, in his ministry, often associated his emotions with the emotions of Christ. For example, Paul said, “For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:8).

A STUDY OF JESUS' EMOTIONS

Jesus was made flesh, and He dwelt among men (John 1:14). Jesus was all human, and He experienced every aspect of humanity, including emotions. We read in the Philippian letter:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

We see the emphasis that we must have the same mind, the same attitude, as Christ Jesus, who was made in the form and appearance of man.

In the book of Hebrews, we see Jesus described as our High Priest. The High Priests of the Old Testament stood between God and the people. They were examples; they were teachers. Jesus is our ultimate teacher and our great High Priest:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

“Sympathize with our weaknesses” in Verse 16 lets us know that Jesus had human emotions. He experienced them all.

Jesus experienced His emotions under control, without sin. Emotions expressed in today’s society are often not under control. Sometimes, they run wild and crazy because humanity does not know how to control their emotions. Emotions are now also tied to things that are frivolous. When we study the emotions of Jesus, we see that His emotions were tied to things with meaning.

A study of Jesus and His emotions will help Christians come to understand their own emotions better and realize it is alright to have emotions. There are those who teach “do not show your emotions” and “do not show your feelings.” Jesus shows us that feelings need to be expressed.

JESUS AND LOVE

We can see a series of Jesus’ emotions working together in John 11, particularly verses 5-38. Jesus had gotten word that Lazarus was sick unto death. “But when Jesus heard it, He said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified by it.’ Now Jesus **loved** Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus” (John 11:4). We see that Jesus loved. He loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

Jesus’ love resulted in healing the sick, teaching those that were lost, forgiving, having patience, weeping, and ultimately, dying on the cross. In Jesus’ ministry, we can look to many verses to know that He loved:

- The rich man (Mark 10:21);
- Martha, Mary, and Lazarus (John 11:5);
- One of his disciples (John 13:23);
- His apostles to the very end (John 13:1);
- You and me, enough to die on the cross for us (Phil. 2:8).

And walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma (Eph. 5:2).

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love; may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17).

JESUS AND JOY

"I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him" (John 11:15). These words were uttered by Jesus as He told His disciples that Lazarus was dead. He said I am **glad**. When we think of death, we react with sorrow. It is a time of grief, and it is natural to grieve. "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). But Jesus said, "I am glad," because when the Father is glorified and people believe in Him, we ought to show gladness.

Jesus teaches us the emotion of joy. He wants our joy to be as His joy. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). Although the gospels do not mention that Jesus was joyful, his activities demonstrate that He was happy; He was glad; and He was joyful. As he came to Zaccheus' house, in Luke 19:7, he was glad to eat dinner with Zaccheus. When He came to Lazarus' house, in John 12:2, after Lazarus was raised from the grave, it is implied that He was happy to be with them.

Jesus wants us to have joy and enjoy life. He says, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus does not want us to be grieved and sorrowful all of our lives. Even at His death and the anticipation that He would be back with the Father, He is our example: "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before

Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Some people, even some Christians, believe they cannot show joy and be happy. But we can balance our joy with our sadness, realizing that both these emotions will come in our lives. We have a God who cares.

JESUS AND ANGER

Many people feel uncomfortable with the emotion of anger, but it is an emotion that the Bible talks about. Anger is an emotion that was out of control in Genesis 4, which led to the killing and murder of Abel.

Perhaps some of us also feel uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus becoming angry. Matthew portrays Jesus as being angry in a number of passages. Jesus did not become angry over small matters, and He did not express His anger in disproportionate ways. When Jesus became angry He did not bottle it up, but released it in sharp rebukes.

He called Peter Satan for attempting to deflect Him from His mission. “But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, ‘Get thee behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Mark 8:33). In John 2:15ff, Jesus shows both zeal and anger. Jesus had zeal for His Father’s house, displaying anger to those who were selling and the moneychangers. Jesus ran them out of the temple because they made God’s house the house of merchandise. Later in His ministry, Jesus again ran the money changers out (Matt. 21:12-13). In Matthew 23:13-35, Jesus shows his anger towards the scribes and Pharisees when He calls them hypocrites, and He exposed their ways.

Anger is an emotion that we can control. Many passages in the Bible let us know that anger can be controlled:

- “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger pacifies contention” (Prov. 15:18);

- “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city” (Prov. 16:32);
- “This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20);
- “Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (Eph. 4:26).

We must be transformed into Christ's way of expressing anger. If our anger is out of control, we cannot achieve the righteousness of God. There are several things we must do to deal with anger:

1. Admit that one is angry;
2. Recognize the source of the anger; where is it coming from;
3. Be willing to deal with one's anger.

When anger is out of control, it becomes **destructive**. When anger is in control it becomes **constructive**.

JESUS AND COMPASSION

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled.” Jesus felt compassion and sympathized with those that were grieved and were in sorrow. Luke 7 is a good example of the compassion of Jesus in this funeral situation, a death:

And it came about soon afterwards, that he went to a city called Nain, and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large multitude. Now as He approached the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. And when the

Lord saw her, He **felt** compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said "Young man, I say to you, arise!" And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother (Luke 7:11-15).

Here, we see three things about Jesus: He **saw**, He **felt**, He **did**. Jesus **saw** the situation: a mother and her only son. He **felt** her pain. He **raised** her son and **gave** him back to her. Jesus' compassion led to doing, serving, and ministering.

We see another familiar story in Luke 10, in the story of the Good Samaritan:

But a certain Samaritan who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (Luke 10:33-34).

Jesus gave an example of himself in the story of the Good Samaritan: He **saw**, he **felt**, he **acted** upon. He served. As Jesus ends his conversation with the lawyer, He asks:

"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him" And Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same" (Luke 10:36-37).

Jesus wants us to do the same. He wants us to have the emotion of compassion, but a compassion that is not only going to see and feel, but serve.

JESUS AND SORROW

John 11:35 is one of the most quoted verses of the Bible, often cited by children in their memory verses: "Jesus wept." The

Greek term for the word wept is *dakruo*, used only in this New Testament passage. It literally means to shed tears, and it suggests a silent and tender weeping.

Jesus Christ wept, not because as some said, He was bringing Lazarus back to a life of hardship. Jesus wept because He was sympathetic toward those whose heart was broken by the death of their friend and brother.

Isaiah describes Jesus as a man of sorrow, one who was acquainted with grief:

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God and afflicted (Isa. 53:3-4).

We must learn to empathize with others. "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). When the son of God contemplated the situation at Jerusalem, the scriptures tells us He wept. "And when He approached, He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). This was a weeping in anguish because He knew the great horror that would come to the city of Jerusalem.

We need to mourn over our own sins and the sins of others. We also need to mourn over those that are lost. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4).

Jesus wept bitterly during the hours of his crucifixion. Probably, His weeping reflects every aspect of bearing the sins of many. "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety" (Heb. 5:7).

EMOTIONS TIED TO ACTIONS

The emotions of Jesus, throughout His ministry, were tied to appropriate actions. His emotions were not just feelings without action.

We see that Jesus loved, and this emotion was followed by action. We are to do the same. "And walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph. 5:2).

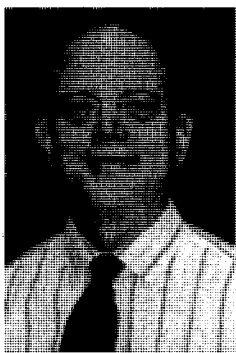
We see that Jesus had compassion. As Christians, it is not enough for us to simply see and feel; we need to be willing to **do** also. "But whoever has the world's good, and **sees** his brother in need and closes his heart against, him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17).

CONCLUSION

Jesus is our perfect example on emotions. It is alright to express emotions, but one must do it through the eyes of Christ and by His example. Our emotions should lead to an action that glorifies God.

THE TEACHING STYLE OF JESUS

EDWIN JONES



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Although I do not hear the observation as commonly as I once did, a foundational truth about Christianity is it is a *“taught religion.”* Or, as another standard saying declares, *“We are always but one generation from apostasy.”*

Teaching is fundamental to both the existence and quality of Christianity (Rom. 10:14-15; Eph. 4:11-16). And since we are doing the cliché thing, a computer phrase comes to mind, *“Garbage in, garbage out.”* We could, therefore, hardly overestimate the role of truthful, insightful, convicting teaching.

With the preceding rather obvious thoughts in mind, let me share with you the threefold purpose of my related topic. Under the overarching focus of *“The Teaching Style of Jesus,”* I want to develop a practical insight into Jesus’ teaching methods, accent His goal of character development, and target the way He cultivated with His followers a growing relationship of love.

In each of the three subdivisions of my general emphasis, I want us to see a model or pattern. Actually, I want us to see a pattern within a pattern. The central or core pattern in all we are investigating is Jesus Himself. Unfortunately, in all our talk about patterns in the Lord's church, I have rarely heard any practical, serious attention given to Jesus as the preeminent pattern.

Think about it! We have correctly extracted patterns of church government, worship on the Lord's Day, how to become a Christian, etc., but what about the pattern of Jesus Himself (John 1:18, 14:7-9)? In the particular matter of teaching styles, how often do we center such discussions on the Christ? With all the "*methods*" we have developed and presented in education, where is the overt, practical, reproducible **Jesus First Model**? God does, after all, have a less than subtle message in the fact He made the Gospels almost half the content of the New Testament. The Father is asking us to do as Philip suggested (cf. John 1:46), "*Come and see...*"

Within this overarching "*Jesus Pattern*," I believe we encounter an important "pattern within a pattern." This secondary pattern helps us to establish some concrete, practical understandings for translating the "*Jesus Pattern*" into present-day reality.

Consider the following progression: **PURPOSE > CONTENT > CHARACTER (RESULTS)**. Give some thought to how the relationship of these three steps work to move us into Christlikeness, the ultimate goal of teaching (Rom. 8:29).

Jesus taught with a Father-directed purpose (John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10; 17:4; 19:28, 30). This purpose shaped and defined **everything** He did and said. Therefore, and only because of this exact replication of the Father's will, Jesus Himself serves as our pattern (cf. Acts 1:1). Note also in Acts 1:1, especially since Acts 2 and the beginning of the church has commonly been given as the "hub," of the Bible, **Luke started with Jesus before he dealt with the church.**

Jesus had a Father-driven purpose that totally defined the content of His words and deeds. This content, when embraced, transformed people into Christlike disciples (cf. Acts 4:13). **PURPOSE > CONTENT > CHARACTER**, this is the pattern that defined the teaching model of Jesus. If we choose to let Jesus be our pattern in teaching, we will welcome this pattern and make it our own.

Let us take a moment now to orient to where we are in our discussion. First, Jesus is the overarching model, pattern, or example for all things, including teaching. He is a living, breathing, real-life, personal “if-you-have-seen-me-you-have-seen the Father,” model. However, within the primary model of Christ Himself, we have a “*pattern within the pattern*” of **PURPOSE > CONTENT > CHARACTER**. This secondary pattern alerts us to the importance of associating our *content* (curriculum) to God’s *purposes* so as to promote *character* development. We are not as teachers, if we are teaching in the Jesus’ style, J-U-S-T transmitting information. We are, if following the Jesus model, choosing the information we transmit so as to honor God’s overarching purpose (Christlikeness) and develop Christlike students.

With these things understood, we are now prepared to go to another important consideration, an additional sub-model we discover as we learn from the teaching methods of Jesus.

LEARNING FROM THE TEACHING METHODS OF JESUS

The subhead given above for our next level of discussion is somewhat misleading. The truth is that Jesus did not as much have teaching methods as He had a character or personhood that intuitively (second nature skill) assessed and addressed varied teaching opportunities. With this inner developed character, He applied the appropriate content and presentation to suit the need of the moment. This teaching from within Himself is, by the way, the absolutely, positively, nonnegotiable goal God intends every teacher to embrace (cf. Gal. 2:20).

What, however, is to be in the heart to allow us to connect successfully with others in our teaching? Most obviously, though not commonly addressed with any persistent intensity, it is the “method” of Christlike personal integrity. Before a Christian can do mature work in the kingdom, he or she must be a person of Christlike character (cf. Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 3:1-4; Gal. 4:19).

Christlike integrity brings a host of intangibles to teaching opportunities. Jesus, obviously the ultimate Christlike example, was an effective teacher because He was first the kind of man He was. To teach skills apart from character is foolish and unbiblical. To teach skills as mere outward techniques, not designed to be matter of our second-nature makeup, is to foster hypocrisy.

That being said, there are particular “*methods*” Jesus used to transfer the content of His heart into the hearts of others – which is what teaching is all about (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16). Most of these methods were forms of discovery learning. Jesus did not speak truth by simply laying out some facts; He expected his audience to “ask, seek and knock” (Matt. 7:7-8). A lazy, uninterested, uncommitted audience was a group for whom Jesus had little time (John 6:26). Therefore, if interest and commitment are not present, the cultivation of such attitudes needs to become the first order of business (cf. Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:1-3). There will be no effective teaching if people do not want to learn. Those with “ears to hear” learn (cf. Matt. 11:15, etc.)

Discovery learning, putting pieces of information together to find relationships, insights, and application, is important for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the relationships, insights and applications learned in this manner actually become part of us. Discovery integrates truth into the already existing content of our heart and mind – it becomes part of us. Of all the teaching techniques available, only discovery truly ingrains itself for life in the very fabric of our being.

Under this methodological umbrella of a discovery approach, we will now give a variety of specifics. **Parables** are perhaps the best-known example of discovery learning. Wrapped in a story about an everyday life experience is hidden a heavenly

or spiritual application of truth. As the literal meaning of parable “cast beside” suggests, one thing leads to the discovery of another.

Another strategy for discovery is what we might style the **Study In Contrast** approach. Matthew 5:21-48 well illustrates this. Here, Jesus contrasts Pharisaic misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the Old Covenant with His own correct, God-given insights (Matt. 5:17-20). In the contrast between these two conflicting schools of thought, Jesus gave His listeners an opportunity to discover extremely valuable keys to Bible teachings. Note also how Matthew 23:1-33 develops a variety of implied contrasts to allow for the discovery of truth.

Additionally, Jesus allowed insights to be formed through **Analogy**. Examples such as treasure on earth compared to treasure in heaven; the eye being like a lamp to the body; and the fact one can only serve one master at a time, are but a few of the analogies Jesus employed (Matt. 6:19-24). Analogies are exceedingly practical things to convey truth in user-friendly ways. Much of discovery is dependant on establishing relationships between what we know and new understandings we need to develop.

Yet another discovery model is what I will call the **Principal Principle**. Note the differences in spelling. Jesus often gave His hearers certain primary principles to assist them in their search for truth. On one such occasion He spoke of the “weightier” function of “justice, mercy, and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23-24). Twice, He is recorded as citing a pivotal, primary truth to put less weighty concerns in their proper perspective (Matt. 9:9-13; 12:1-7).

Undoubtedly the most well-known example of the **Principal Principle** is found in Matthew 22:34-40, especially note verse 40. We could even call this the **Principal Principal, Principle**. Forgive me, I could not resist!

The Great Commandment and its inseparable companion (cf. 1 John 4:20-21) offer invaluable insights into how overarching

principles govern the application of lesser specifics. This, by way of caution, is not in any way an encouragement to neglect less-weightier matters; it is to give them a sense of proportion and priority (cf. Matt. 23:23-24).

To sum up, Jesus' teaching "*methods*" were from second-nature aspects of His character or personhood (i.e. acquired, internalized life skills). Foremost among such things was his personal integrity. Within the context of His personal integrity, He had a wide variety of discovery teaching tools He employed to transmit His understandings into the hearts and minds of others. Through an understanding of these particular points, we are now ready to have a more pointed look at how Jesus taught with an intention to develop character.

JESUS TAUGHT TO DEVELOP CHARACTER

As is a necessary inference of Jesus' **PURPOSE** to develop **CHARACTER**, He, of course, taught with **CONTENT** in keeping with His **PURPOSE**. It all added up and fit together as a rather seamless whole.

Jesus was not at all interested in simply-just-only teaching to impart factual understanding. Yes, He did indeed teach facts and knew their nonnegotiable, essential value. He did, however, see facts or truths as a means to a larger, more fundamentally significant goal. He wanted receptive hearts that would be transformed by His words. He wanted people who would enthusiastically latch on to the values that characterize God. He wanted people who would, in their eager reception of the truth, be dramatically changed from within. We have no right to want anything short of Jesus' lofty purposes.

Observe how the Epistles of the New Testament square up with Jesus' using His teaching content to develop character. Consider the implications of the following verses' relationship to the development of Christlike character:

1. John 1:1, 14, 18
2. John 14:7-9

3. Matthew 11:27-30
4. Romans 8:9, 29
5. 1 Corinthians 2:10-16
6. 2 Corinthians 3:18
7. Galatians 2:20; 4:19
8. Ephesians 3:16-17; 4:11-16
9. Philippians 2:5
10. Colossians 1:24-29
11. 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13
12. 2 Thessalonians 3:3-5
13. 1 Timothy 1:5; 3:2a
14. 2 Timothy 2:15
15. Titus 3:5
16. Philemon 4-5
17. Hebrews 5:13 – 6:1a
18. James 2:14; 3:13-18
19. 1 Peter 2:1-3; 3:15
20. 2 Peter 1:2-9
21. 1 John 3:3, 7, 10
22. 2 John 1-3
23. 2 John 11
24. Jude 20-21
25. Revelation 2:4-5

Convinced? Sure you are; doubtless you already were. It is not that we do not know such things; our problem has been we sometimes do not give them their due. We are not always specifically and practically focused on the content of our instruction as it relates to God's overarching purpose of Christlike character development.

In saying we have not always been as focused as we should have been, I do not at all exclude myself. Neither do I mean we have not taught meaningful truths – we certainly have! What I mean, brothers and sisters, is we are not always as plugged into God's overriding purpose for Christianity and, therefore, are not always as purposeful in our content. What we teach may not always be reasonably expected to strongly and persistently address Christlike character development.

To be more successful at this, we need to appreciate better that a key ingredient in the character development mix is the active participation of learners. We touched on this earlier when we noted discovery learning requires a learner to participate mentally in the learning process. However, in addition to using our brains, Jesus wants us to use what we discover by applying it to life – practice makes perfect.

Some “*for instances*” are in order. If we are to get the most out of our teaching opportunities, those opportunities need to be seen as part of a bigger whole. Since we are talking about character development, instruction alone is not enough. Developing Christlikeness is not like memorizing the state capitals for a U.S. history test. For teaching to lead to character development, we need eager mental participation to make discoveries from the truths we have been taught; but we also need to apply and practice what we learn (Heb. 5:14).

Notice how Jesus expected people to do something with what He taught. After hearing a lawyer’s correct, factual assessment of the two greatest commandments, Jesus told him “do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). After the message of the story about the Good Samaritan was admitted by the lawyer, Jesus told him to “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of the folly of just saying “Lord, Lord,” and of the need to both hear and do (Matt. 7:21-27). He pointedly asked why people would talk the talk without walking the walk (Luke 6:46) as well as scathingly pointing out the unacceptable condition of those who “say and do not do ...” (Matt. 23:3).

Therefore, it would seem we need to include “*doing*” in our overall curriculum planning. When children are involved, we need partnerships with the home that will exceed merely encouraging the grudging filling in of workbook blanks. We need real-life deeds to do. Family commitments to be collectively involved in serving others would be a good way to address aspects of this. Developing useful, real-life personal commitments for individual students, supported, facilitated, and encouraged by parents would also further character development.

Similarly, adults could work with mates, or with the Bible class, or with smaller groups, or in private life to put into practice what they are discovering or what they already know. And remember, even the things we know come to be better understood and appreciated as we use our knowledge in practical ways.

Congregational-wide commitment can also be developed with a considerable emphasis and encouragement given to total participation (Eph. 4:16). We are, after all, a body – each of us surely has something God expects us to do as we work together as a family (1 Cor. 12:12-27). And let us remember, Jesus is not a subscriber to the 80/20 principle where we accept that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the membership. If the Holy Spirit had bought into that, the reading of I Corinthians 12:12-27 would sound much different.

So, where are we now? Jesus taught from within Himself to address effectively the real world He faced. In so doing, He most commonly used Discovery Learning strategies to facilitate character development. In this, He not only wanted mental participation, He wanted people to practice what He preached and what they came to affirm. Education needs to honor these principles. With everything thus far presented in mind, we are ready for the, as yet, vital missing ingredient – the secret to 100% success every time!

JESUS TAUGHT TO CULTIVATE A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE BETWEEN HIMSELF AND HIS DISCIPLES

Depending on whether you use a KJV, NKJK as your basic study text or you use an eclectic text such as the ASV or NASB, you will first notice the principle to be considered next in either John 14:15 or John 14:23. Either way, the key to success in the teaching process to develop Christlikeness is easy to grasp, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

In the church, we often fret and fuss over failures and unsuccessful ventures. We wonder what to do. We try different programs and methods that only frustrate us further. We have

long lists of “things” to try, but these things seem to give only fleeting results at best. What is missing?

The answer is simple – we fail due to a lack of love. Hang on, that does not mean there is a total lack of love, just that there is an insufficient amount necessary for the challenge at hand. This principle has gigantic implications that can and should forever change the way we commonly address teaching responsibilities. Not only teaching is affected by this principle, it encompasses all our God-given responsibilities. If we really, really want to be spiritually successful, we need to first focus on growing in our love for Jesus. To the extent that we love Him, we serve Him, and serve Him well.

The conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter in John 21:15-19 will help us flesh out the principle. Prior to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, Jesus told Peter he would deny Him, which, as we know, Peter did (Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34). This conversation at the end of John’s gospel draws from that previous exchange between Peter and Christ.

In our John passage, there is an interesting twist in the Greek of the thing. The back and forth between Jesus and Simon employs the word love six times, three by Jesus, three by Simon. It goes like this: Do you love Me? Yes, I love You. Do you love Me? Yes, I love You. Do you love Me? Yes, I love You. The curious feature, unrevealed in our English Bibles, is that “love” is not always translated from the same Greek word. In order of appearance, it goes like this: First exchange – *agapao/phileo*; second exchange – *agapao/phileo*; third exchange - *phileo/phileo*.

Many views have been advanced to explain this seeming peculiarity. Some feel it is merely a stylistic characteristic somewhat common to the way John often uses two different words to mean the same thing. The other main line of interpretation believes there is more to be made of the particular words chosen. I side with the latter.

It is true John does use single words with double meanings and allows both meanings to make a contribution. Further, it is

true John uses different words to mean the same thing. This, however, looks different to me. The a/b, a/b, b/b rhythm is unbalanced, it is not uniform. The obvious difference at the point of the third exchange would have been readily noticed by those who read the gospel in Greek.

Here is what I make of it. In view of the fact the pre-crucifixion conversation had Peter pledging not to deny the Lord, only to deny Him three times, seems to draw a direct connection with Jesus' threefold question about Peter's love. Additionally, although *agapao* and *phileo* can be used interchangeably, and John does this on occasion (John 3:35 and 5:20; 11:5 and 11:36), the words do have a degree of possible contrast. Unlike a rather common simplistic view of the difference between the two most used Greek words for "love," it is **not** that *phileo* has no loyalty or determination associated with it and *agape* has no warmth (note 1 Cor. 13:4-8a) but only dogged determination to it. The differences are commonly more subtle. There is much overlay between the two, which, as mentioned, leads to a degree of interchangeability.

However, there is contrast. *Phileo* has a stronger emotional factor as an expression of brotherly love; it does not have as strong a mental toughness as *agape* can express. Therefore, regarding the issue Jesus takes up with Simon Peter, it was not, in my judgment, that Peter failed because he had no love for Jesus – in many ways his love was uncommonly strong. The point at issue was he needed a stronger love.

Jesus, therefore, deals with Peter's need in a very realistic and helpful manner, though the process is a difficult one for Simon. First, Jesus gives Peter a reality check so He and Simon can move forward in keeping with the actual condition of their relationship. In short, Simon did not have as strong a love as he had previously professed. To progress beyond that and get to a better place, Simon needed to start where he was. The third exchange in John 21:15-17 highlights this proposed reality check.

In the third question and answer phase of the conversation, Peter is not, as I understand it, upset Jesus asks him a third time if he loves Him. In other words, the number of

times the question was asked is not what I believe to be at issue. I believe the matter that struck Simon hard is that in the third exchange Jesus questions whether he had *phileo* love. Thus, I believe Peter's third response finds him smarting because Jesus now asks him if he truly does have even the lower level of love represented by the word *phileo*.

Again, to reinforce and clarify my point, Peter's third response, as I interpret it, might be paraphrased, "*You know all things, you know I don't have the agape level of love I professed, but you do know I do have phileo love for you.*"

Thanks for staying with me on this one. I really am going somewhere important with this. My point is this, if we are going to move forward with our Christlikeness, we must have a sufficiently strong love – otherwise, it will not happen. Therefore, Jesus developed relationships with people so that as their love for Him increased, the quality of both their character and their service would increase. We should pick up on this vital factor and give a strong priority to cultivating in those we teach an ever-growing love for Jesus.

How will we do this, you may well ask? Well, remember how we previously observed there was a message in how God made about 50% of the New Testament to be comprised of the four Gospels. Is a light bulb of discovery going off in your head? Here is the point. The person of Jesus living among us in the flesh is the most pointed focus of the New Testament.

We have long heard among us that Acts 2 as the beginning of the church is therefore the "hub" of the Bible. It most certainly is not the "hub!" Jesus, the builder and founder, and anchor of **all** that pertains to the church, He is the undisputed, unrivaled, unchallenged "hub" of the Bible. I will passionately argue this point without fear of successful contradiction. Our love and loyalty to Jesus is what establishes our love and loyalty to His church, not the other way around. Okay, I will get off my soapbox on that one, but you see the reason for the passion of my declaration. All loves are secondary to our love for God, and in the Christian age this love focuses on the Christ (cf. John 16:13-16).

With that in mind, let us reflect for a bit, on a passage in the Epistles to reinforce even further the critical nature of our point about loving Jesus. Our text is 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died, and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." The point is hard to miss, is it not?

Now, back to our point on the extremely high percentage of total New Covenant content taken up by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Here we see Jesus in action in the best object lesson God could ever give – God in the flesh (John 2:14; 14:7-9). We get a sense for who God is and what that means for our life in this incarnated opportunity that surpasses all other learning experiences.

As we see the Christ in action, if we have any ability at all to appreciate and love God, this will pierce our hearts. His courage, compassion, brilliance, commitment, devotion, energy, ingenuity, wisdom, zeal, and love make Him the Man among Men. Jesus is unlike any person who has ever lived. If we cannot love Him, how can we ever love anything? Unless selfishness and pride win out, we should be drawn to Him in shameless adoration (cf. Luke 7:36-50).

And the clincher is this; this God/Man died for us! While sinners, He died for us (Rom. 5:6-8)! He is the greatest gift of love that ever could be given (John 12:32-33).

The Gospels are foundational. Some have ignored this, others have distorted it to undermine the mind of Christ as expressed in the Epistles, but the fact remains – the Gospels are fundamental. Apart from Christ, there is no reason to move beyond. Because of Jesus, there is every reason to grow and serve.

Yes, to grow in love for Him is truly the key. Even as a devoted mother would suffer great injury, even death, without thinking of abandoning her child, so a devoted love for Jesus will

not think of abandoning Him! Much more than not abandoning Him; however, we will imitate Him without embarrassment, even as a child imitates a beloved parent.

Teaching begins with love; the love Jesus has for all of us and the love we have for Him. The love for Jesus we seek to instill in those we teach is, therefore, most fundamental and necessary. Apart from the motivation generated by our love for Christ, we will fail. The lesson is unavoidable; we need to employ as a first priority the development of relationships of love between Jesus and all those we might be privileged to teach.

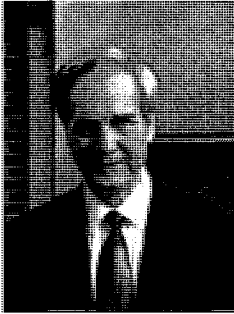
SUMMATION AND CONCLUSION

JESUS – His character and life will inspire love for Him and cause us to seek to know Him and His purpose. PURPOSE – Christlikeness will dictate our teaching content. CONTENT – blending what and how we teach into a spoken and unspoken curriculum that can be seen to clearly facilitate the accomplishment of God's purposes through discovery and application to develop Christlike character. CHARACTER – the result of purposeful content taken to heart and lived out with devotion.

The teaching style of Jesus is but an extension of His essential identity. As He was, so He did. In all things He should and must be acknowledged as the supreme motivation for all that is good. As we allow His motivation to encourage us to discover God's purpose for us, we will teach from our growing Christlikeness to bring about a transformed character in our students.

THE EXAMPLE OF COMPASSION

CHARLES BROWN



Charles Brown was born in Henderson County, TN. He and Jane (Pierce) have three children; Steven, Tim, and Karen Green, and nine grandchildren. Charles attended FHC (AA), DLC (BA), and Memphis State College (MA). He preached his first sermon in October 1950, and has done local work in TN, NJ, VA, and OH. Mission trips to Ghana and India have been made. He has spoken almost 4,000 times on the radio and has appeared on numerous church and college lectureships. He has taught at FHC and OVC, and at ETSPM since 1991, where he is also Dean of Admissions.

INTRODUCTION

Luke described the Gospel of Luke as declaring “all that Jesus began both to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1).¹ The words of Jesus were powerful. Those who heard His “Sermon on the Mount” were astonished, “For he taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:28,29). His actions gave to His words even greater power. The Master Teacher left us examples, and we are to follow in His footsteps (1 Pet. 3:21). He was not among those who “say and do not” (Matt. 23:3). His deeds and his words always complimented each other.

The teachings of Jesus stressed the importance of compassion. Three of His parables are impressive examples: the Parable of the Unjust Servant (Matt. 18); the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10); and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15).

JESUS SHOWED COMPASSION

However, we find references of compassion more often in the life of Jesus. On at least three occasions it is said Jesus had compassion on the multitudes who gathered around Him.

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them (Matt. 14:14).

Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitudes, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way (Matt. 15:32).

In addition to these examples of compassion for the multitudes, Jesus is said to have had compassion on one or two people on numerous occasions.

- He had compassion on two blind men in Jericho (Matt. 20:34).
- He had compassion on a leper in Galilee (Mark 1:41).
- He had compassion on a troubled man among the tombs (Mark 5:1ff).
- He had compassion on one with a dumb and a deaf spirit (Mark 9:1ff).
- He had compassion on a widow of Nain whose only son had died (Luke 7:13).

It is not to be concluded that the compassion of Jesus was limited to these few times. We can be assured that every time Jesus was confronted by those who had emotional, physical, social, or spiritual needs, he was moved with compassion.

WHAT IS COMPASSION?

What does the word compassion mean? How is it to be understood? The following definitions should help us understand.

Compassion: From Latin *com* + *pati*: to bear, suffer – more at patient, sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.²

SPLANCHIZOMAI, to be moved as to one's inwards (*SPLANCHNA*), to be moved with compassion, to yearn with compassion.³

From the verb *SPLANCHANA* – The nobler *visera*, that is, the heart, the lungs, the liver and the intestines. The Greeks held these to be the seat of emotions, especially of anger, of anxiety, of fear, and even of love.... It describes ordinary pity or compassion, but an emotion which moves a man to the very depths of his being. It is the strongest word in Greek for the feeling of compassion.⁴

OUR GOD IS GLORIOUS, HOLY, ETERNAL, COMPASSIONATE

Stephen declared that the “God of Glory [GLORIOUS GOD]” appeared to Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2). Later, after Abram was in Canaan and ninety-nine years of age, God appeared to him identifying himself by saying, “I am the almighty God” (Gen. 17:1). He is the creator of the universe. He made something from nothing. He created life from non-life. There is nothing the Lord cannot do (Gen. 18:13; Matt. 19:26; Jer. 32:17).

When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, His holiness was manifested, and God said, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:5,6). Later, “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM [I AM BECAUSE I AM]” (v. 14). From this, we see the eternal and self-sufficient nature of God.

But it was while Moses was on the Holy Mount that Jehovah revealed Himself as the God of Compassion.

And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (Exo. 34:5-7).

The compassion of God is referred to often in the Psalms: "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Psa. 86:15; c.f. 111:4; 145:8, etc.).

His compassion forgave Israel when He might have destroyed them, and "many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath" (Psa. 78:38).

During the days of King Jehoahaz, Israel was oppressed by Syria.

And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet (2 Kings 13:23).

Compassion is truly a heavenly trait, a divine characteristic. We have a compassionate God, and we have a compassionate Son of God. Because of God's compassion for a lost world, He gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16), and because of his compassion for a sinful world, the Son laid down his life (John 10:15). Both acted out of mercy and compassion.

COMPASSION RESULTS IN ACTIONS

Compassion is more than pity; it is more than empathy. Compassion is deep emotion. It is a desire to meet another need. Compassion results in moving one to take action.

When Jesus saw the multitude scattered as sheep without a shepherd, he cried, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few: Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into the harvest" (Matt. 9:37, 38). Jesus was soon to lay down his life for those poor, scattered sheep! At another time his compassion for the multitude moved him to heal their sick (Matt. 14:14). His compassion for another multitude caused him to feed 4,000 men, plus women and children, with a few loaves and a few fish (Matt. 15:33, 39).

On other occasions, his compassion moved Jesus to restore sight to two blind men (Matt. 20:30); to cast out evil spirits (Mark 5:13ff); to cast out a deaf and dumb spirit (Mark 9:25-27); and to raise from the dead the only son of a widow (Luke 7:13-15).

Compassion, like love and faith (John 14:15; James 2:18), is seen by its actions. We cannot see love, faith, and compassion, just as we cannot see the wind or electricity, but we can see the evidences of each.

While America is far from being a New Testament "Christian" nation, it does reflect the influences of Christ more than perhaps any other nation. Whether at home or abroad, Americans open their hearts and pocketbooks when hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, and famines occur. Americans, out of compassion, build hospitals, schools, homes for homeless children, etc. This is in stark contrast with other parts of the world that have been influenced little by the teachings of Christ.

GOD'S PEOPLE SHOULD BE A COMPASSINATE PEOPLE

Nowhere should the spirit of compassion be more clearly seen than in the Lord's church. To be Godlike and Christlike requires having compassionate spirits. The world can be

extremely harsh in its attitudes. Christians must strive to be different. Worldliness focuses on self; compassion focuses on others. To the churches in Philippi and Colossae, Paul penned the following words:

If there is therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies [compassion], Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind...Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1,2,5).

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies [a heart of compassion], kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if a man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye (Col. 3:12,13).

The compassion of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) moved him to go to the troubled man, bind his wounds, use his own oil and wine to treat him, transport him to an inn on his own donkey, care for him, pay the innkeeper, and promise to pay any additional costs. The father of the prodigal son (Luke 15) ran to meet his son, embraced and repeatedly kissed him, placed shoes, robe and ring on him, and have a feast with the best calf. The master freed and forgave his servant (Matthew 18). Compassion motivated each of these actions.

We preach and teach by words; we preach and teach by actions. Unless the two agree, positive influence is greatly eroded.

SIX SIMPLE RULES IN BECOMING A CARING PERSON

Bill Watkins preaches for the Crieve Hall church of Christ in Nashville and wrote the following practical suggestions for becoming a caring, compassionate person.

1. First, Identify People who Need Your Care. Sit down and make a list of the needs of people around you: your family, the church, neighbors, etc. "Lift up your eyes and look..." (John 4:35).
2. Second, Reach Out to Others, Don't Wait for Them to Come to You. When you are at the church building, notice people, shake their hand and introduce yourself. Take time to get to know them. Most people are private. They will not ever bother you with their burdens until you take time to get involved with them. "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them..." (Matt. 7:12).
3. Communicate Beyond the Superficial Level. When you meet someone it's okay to "talk about the weather." However, as you develop a relationship, pursue depth by asking meaningful questions. "A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24).
4. Empathize With Them. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Let them know that you are willing to help them. Get under their load with them.
5. Listen Without Judging. Good listening requires concentration, hearing what is not said as well as that which is said. It involves eye contact and body language. It means trying to communicate. In this way, you can hear a person's heart, needs, and anxieties. Listen with the ears of Jesus. "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19).
6. Respond With a Caring Gift. Give something tangible that says, "I'm praying for you" or "I'm with you." It might be a card, a book, a bookmark. A great thing to give them is the Crieve Hall DVD that is available in the foyer. It is something they can hold in their hands.⁵

CONCLUSION

Everybody wants to be part of a caring church, but a caring church is made up of caring individuals. Are you willing to work at being a caring person?

I'd rather see a sermon,
Than hear one any day;
I'd rather one would walk with me
Than merely show the way.
The eye's a better pupil
And more willing than the ear;
Fine counsel is confusing
But example's always clear.
And best of the preachers
Are the ones who live their creed,
For all to see good put in action
Is what everybody needs.
I soon can learn to do it,
If you let me see it done.
I can watch your hands in action,
But your tongue too fast may run.
And the sermon you deliver
May be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lesson
By observing what you do,
For I might misunderstand you
And the high advice you give;
But there's no misunderstanding
How you act and how you live.

ENDNOTES

1. All Scriptures from KJV unless noted.
2. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Merriam-Webster, Inc.: Springfield, MA, 1990.
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JESUS: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

JOHN 10

TIM FORLINES



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In John, chapter 10, Jesus presented an “illustration” centering around shepherding. In the course of giving this teaching, He made two additional claims that take their place alongside His other “I am” statements recorded by John: “I am the bread of life” (6:35); “I am the light of the world” (8:12); “Before Abraham was, I Am” (8:58); “I am the Son of God” (10:36); “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “I am the way the truth and the life” (14:6); and “I am the true vine” (15:1).¹ Here, Jesus proclaimed: “I am the door of the sheep” (v. 7) and “I am the good Shepherd” (v. 14). Like His other claims, these two statements boldly proclaim some aspect of His deity wherein He relates to those who would follow Him. They are rich in meaning for the Christian.

THE BACKGROUNDS CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Shepherding was a common occupation in Palestine in ancient times and can still be observed in middle eastern cultures. Jesus' words about the "door of the sheep," the "fold," the "wall," the "shepherd" and other figures in the comparison would ring familiar to any of His hearers at that time. Today we need to familiarize ourselves with the cultural context of shepherding in ancient Israel to most fully appreciate Jesus' words.

Typically, sheep were kept in flocks, each flock led and cared for by an individual shepherd. However, at night several flocks would be kept together in a single "sheepfold." This was an outdoor area, often enclosed by a wall made of rocks or sticks, entered by a single "door" or gate. This gate was sometimes simply an opening in the enclosure, having no actual gate as we understand the term. In such situations, the shepherd himself would literally lie down across this opening at night. No sheep could leave or enter without going through the shepherd. Of course, this helps us appreciate Jesus' description of Himself as the "door of the sheep!"

Similarly, the emphasis in the text upon the response of the sheep to the voice of their shepherd (vv. 3, 4) is based in the practice of actual shepherding. The sheep of a particular flock actually do respond to the voice of their own shepherd, while ignoring others' voices. One observer reported an experiment in which several shepherds separated to different places some distance from the sheepfold where their flocks were being kept together. At once, the shepherds began calling their sheep, who responded by correctly assembling into their respective flocks unto their own shepherds. No sheep went to the wrong shepherd!²

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Before the "I am" statements in the text, Jesus introduces the first of the two by speaking of the differences between true and false shepherds. Hebrews in New Testament times – particularly those who knew the law (like the scribes and

Pharisees) – would be familiar with the *figure* of a shepherd as used a number of times in the Old Testament.

Of course, the most recognizable instance of this figure is Psalm 23, where David tells of the security and hope that were his because his Lord was his Shepherd. God's relationship to His faithful is never set forth with more of a sense of intimacy and comfort than in Psalm 23.

It is interesting to note that the greatest leaders of God's people were also shepherds, in the literal sense. The patriarchs (Gen. 46:31-34), Moses (Ex. 3:1), and David (1 Sam. 16:19; 17:15, 33-37) were all shepherds.

More pertinent to Jesus' opening words in John 10, however, is the use of the shepherding metaphor in the Old Testament to describe Hebrew *teachers* and *leaders*. For instance, Moses had prayed for God to set a man over Israel who could serve as their shepherd (cf. Num. 27:15ff). The prophets would eventually level sharp criticisms against the self-serving "shepherds" of Israel who were, to say the least, deficient in their duties (cf. Jer. 23:1ff; Ezek. 34:2ff).

In this regard, a consideration of the events recorded in John chapter 9 is helpful. Jesus had healed a man born blind (vv. 1-7). The Pharisees, always critical of Jesus, questioned the man (and his parents) because the healing had occurred on the Sabbath (vv. 13-23). Unsatisfied with the answers they received, they put him out of the synagogue (v. 34). Subsequently, Jesus found the man and encouraged him (vv. 35-38). We cannot help but think of how the contrast between Jesus' actions and those of the Pharisees in chapter 9 illustrates the truths Jesus sets forth about spiritual shepherds in chapter 10. These were the kind of false leaders who were "more interested in fleecing the sheep than in guiding, nurturing and guarding them" and who "belittle and expel the sheep."³ While spiritual applications to these things will be made later, this background information should be helpful in better understanding Jesus' illustration.

A LOOK AT THE TEXT

Jesus' opening words in chapter 10 relate to spiritual shepherds in general. Recalling the cultural background (the description of the work of shepherding in Israel) and the scriptural background (Israel's leaders spoken of as "shepherds" of the people), we find Jesus first speaking in general terms about spiritual shepherds.

First, notice that there are legitimate and illegitimate shepherds. Those who "enter...by the door" and those who climb "up some other way" (v. 1). Those who are legitimate shepherds (v. 2), and those who are "thieves and robbers" (v. 1). The mention of the legitimate shepherd entering by the door reminds us that there is the matter of right and wrong in spiritual matters. There is a right way to approach spiritual things. While the figure of the door is explained in a later verse, here we are reminded that legitimate access to the sheep is granted only to those spiritual shepherds who enter by "the door." Verses 2-5 describe the relationship of the sheep to a true shepherd. It involves calling the sheep by name, being heard by them, and leading them out. Incidentally, it is encouraging to read in Scripture how the Lord knows the names of His sheep, as in our passage, and how our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27). Such is a testimony to the Lord's intimate care for His people, His sheep. Spiritual shepherding demands intimate care, modeled after that of the Lord for his own spiritual sheep. Shepherds are qualified to be shepherds, in part, by their care, as seen here, in their calling the sheep *by name*.

There is also something to be said about the quality of true sheep. They follow the true shepherd (v. 4). They know the voice of the true shepherd (v. 4). Conversely, they will not follow a stranger because they do not recognize his voice (v. 5).

At this point, Jesus has not yet begun to reveal the full meaning of this discourse centering around sheep and shepherds. Verse 6 states that he was giving them an "illustration" (NKJV). While the King James Version has "parable" here, it is not the usual Greek word for "parable." The word here is "*paroimia*" and

has the meaning here of a "dark saying" or a "figure of speech, in which...lofty ideas are concealed."⁴ Some commentators have identified it more as an *allegory*. Verse 6 also says that they did not understand what He was teaching them. One purpose of teaching by parable was to conceal divine truth from those not inclined to accept it (cf. Mark 4:11-12). It is not necessarily wrong to not understand, at first, the teaching of some point of truth; however, it is a different matter when one does not *want* to understand. Many of Jesus' hearers would fall into the latter category.

Jesus begins his explanation in verse 7. His first words of explanation help us to better appreciate the things said in the first few verses about true shepherds and how they gain legitimate access to the sheep. "I am the door of the sheep." Recall that a true shepherd enters by the door (v. 2). The shepherd who has the best interest of the sheep at heart will enter through Jesus. He will do what he does by the authority of Jesus and in keeping with His will in all things. Jesus often confronted those false shepherds who rejected Him while trying to take advantage of His sheep. He continues to address that problem in verse 8 when He speaks of those who came before Him as "thieves and robbers." This is not to say that all who sought to lead God's people before Jesus came into the world were false shepherds and imposters. There were, however, some who falsely claimed to be the Christ, as well as those who sought to lead the people under other false pretenses. We could certainly include the Scribes and Pharisees in this latter group (cf. Matt. 23:14; 7:15, 23; Luke 11:39-52).

Verse 9 speaks of the relationship of Christ, the door, to the sheep themselves. Earlier He has spoken more in terms of being the door in the sense of access to the sheep. Sometimes, the question arises as to whether he is the door *to* or *for* the sheep. William Hendriksen's comments are helpful:

Now this basic idea is given a twofold application. Once that is seen, the question whether Jesus is the door *to* the sheep or whether he is the door *for* the sheep has been answered. In verse 8 Jesus appears as the door *to* the sheep; in verse 9 as the

door *for* the sheep. He, and he alone, is, and is always, the door. For the true shepherd he is the door. For every true sheep he is also the door. For the shepherd he is the door to the sheep. For the sheep he is the door to all the blessings of salvation. The figure is very appropriate: a door leads both in and out: it gives the shepherd access to his sheep that are inside. It gives the sheep access to the fold, and to the pasture which is outside.⁵

Similarly, sometimes readers (and commentators) express confusion over the significance of certain details in the passage. For instance, we can readily understand the appearance of the “stranger” (v. 5), or the “thieves and robbers” (v. 8). On the other hand, what is meant by the “doorkeeper” (v. 3), or the mention of sheep going in and out of the fold (vv. 3, 9)? Likely, the former is simply a detail for the sake of the telling the story, and the latter a picture of blessings and safety rather than a doctrinal statement of some kind having to do with the sheep leaving the fold.

In contrast to those false leaders who had been “thieves and robbers,” Jesus’ interest in the sheep was genuine (v. 10). In the course of demonstrating the contrast between His care of the sheep and the selfish interests of thieves and robbers (steal, kill and destroy, cf. Matt. 23:15), He gave the great declaration: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (v. 10). Where these false leaders brought death and destruction, He brings safety and salvation. Not only does He grant safe entrance into the fold, but He gives all things in *abundance* (Rom. 5:17, 20; Eph. 1:7-8). No wonder David’s heart and pen overflowed (Psalm 23) with the great theme of the rich provision of the Shepherd!

Next, He is the “good shepherd” (v. 11). He has spoken of true spiritual shepherds; He is the truest! Hendriksen notes that the adjective is stressed in this statement: “the shepherd, the good one.”⁶ The word for good (“*kalos*”) is a word having to do with beauty and desirability. He is excellent as our Shepherd. Vincent notes that the word as applied here “points to the essential

goodness as nobly realized, and appealing to admiring respect and affection.”⁷ Many who heard His words on this occasion, far from rejecting Him, should have learned to properly admire Him and embrace Him as their own shepherd. There can be no doubt but that He is the good shepherd when one considers the extent of His care for the sheep: “the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” David had been willing to risk his life for the sheep under his care. Jesus would, with purpose, *give* His life; He would lay it down willingly (cf. v. 18). This provides another point of contrast with false shepherds. There were those shepherds who were hirelings, caring only about what benefit the sheep could bring to them. Such would not protect the sheep like the one to whom they belonged (vv. 12-13).

Verse 16 contains a beautiful promise, which is leading to the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Gentiles. The promise is that there will be “one flock and one shepherd,” the flock consisting of the sheep of Israel and the “other sheep.” The “one flock and one shepherd” is the “mystery” addressed by Paul in Ephesians 3:1-7, where Gentile and Jew are fellow-heirs, together in one body, the church.

LESSONS FOR TODAY'S SHEPHERDS

There are obvious applications of this passage to spiritual shepherding in the church. Consider some of Jesus' own qualities as the Good Shepherd, and note that in each case, He is the example for any who would shepherd God's people today (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

He is the *constant* Shepherd. Jesus is our loyal and faithful Shepherd; our authentic Shepherd. His care is not sporadic, nor driven by comfort and convenience. Remember that our Chief Shepherd committed Himself to making the ultimate sacrifice for the sheep, at the cross (cf. v. 11). Note His contrast between true spiritual shepherds (including and especially Himself) and the hireling. The hireling will not provide constant shepherding. He does not have a keen interest in the welfare of the sheep like the true shepherd does.

Similarly, today's spiritual shepherds should be constant in their care for the sheep of God's fold. The *hireling* represents those whose interest in the sheep is tied to his own sense of opportunity. For instance, it is apparent from Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 5:17 that in the first century, some elders were compensated financially for their work. We can well imagine the occasional man who might want to serve for selfish purposes in this regard. We have seen some *preachers* in our own day, who think that by becoming full-time employees of the church they have found an easy way to make a living! While (regrettably) there are not as many compensated elders today, there are other ways a dishonest man might take advantage of his position in the church for financial gain. It is not unheard of for an elder with access to a congregation's bank account to be caught skimming funds.

Of course, there are other ways the work of spiritual shepherding can be exploited to serve one's own interests. Peter warned against the potential desire on the part of elders to be "lords over those entrusted to" them (1 Pet. 5:3). Christians have told horror stories of elders who were apparently power-hungry. Such men are more interested in *commanding* than in *caring for* God's sheep. There is also the problem of a man wanting to serve for recognition. One might misunderstand the mention of the "office" (KJV) or "position" (NKJV) of bishop in 1 Timothy 3:1. Certainly, Paul's warning against allowing a "novice" to become an elder because of the potential for pride comes to mind (1 Tim. 3:6).

Sadly, we are more likely to hear about the shortcomings of elders in the areas mentioned above than we are to hear about those elders who are ever-faithful in their duties. Is it not the case that those elders who exploit the biblical work of shepherding for their own purposes are in the minority? At the very least, every bad story we hear can be balanced by our knowledge of a good and godly man whose care for God's sheep is constant: genuine, sacrificial, tireless and in humility.

He is the *courageous* Shepherd. One reason the hireling deserts the sheep is the presence of danger (John 10:12). David's

description of his own adventures as a shepherd testifies of the dangers involved in the literal occupation of shepherding (1 Sam. 17:34-35). As long as our adversary seeks to devour God's faithful (1 Pet. 5:8), there will also be danger involved in spiritual shepherding. While physical danger is not as much of a concern, spiritual shepherding takes one into dangerous territory nonetheless.

Wherever there is fear, there is a sense of danger, either real or perceived. Spiritual shepherds today must overcome the fear of danger if they will be effective in leading the souls of men. There is the fear of rejection; in shepherding a congregation, this fear might realize itself in the threat of members leaving because they wish not to follow strong leadership. The fear of rejection works the other way as well – an eldership might fear being rejected by all or some part of the congregation if their leadership is perceived as being too bold. There is the fear of retaliation. Especially in the area of church discipline, the trend in our society toward litigation has caught the attention of some church members who either imply or say outright that they will sue the church if they are disciplined in any way. Sometimes there is simply the fear of change. While concern is rightly shown over “change agents” and their agenda, not all change is bad. A congregation that has stagnated needs sober and forward-thinking leadership to help move ahead for the cause of Christ. On the other hand, a congregation that has gone too far forward in its thinking (cf. 2 John 9) must have the right kind of leadership to help it pull back from rushing ahead of scripture in what is often an unbridled passion for growth. Men of courage are needed for real leadership in the church.

Before leaving this point, notice David's words in verse 4 of the 23rd Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” In the previous verse, he has mentioned “paths of righteousness” (right paths) in which the Shepherd leads his sheep “for His name's sake.” One of those right paths must be “the valley of the shadow of death,” which refers, not exclusively to death, but any place of profound darkness and danger. The sheep are in a place like that because

the Shepherd is leading them through it! As Christians, faithfulness demands surrendering ourselves to the Lord even in situations of danger and uncertainty. Courageous shepherds will go with their sheep wherever necessary and through whatever dangers lurk in the way.

He is the *caring* Shepherd. The very essence of shepherding is caring. Two things, in particular, from the text in John 10 draw our attention to the care of the shepherd for the sheep.

First, there is the contrast between the true shepherd and the hireling. The hireling flees from danger “because he does not care about the sheep” (v. 13). Earlier, we noted that the hireling has an agenda to pursue self-centered opportunities. Consider now the other side of that shortcoming, laid bare: he simply does not care about the sheep. The true shepherd has a deep interest in the sheep and their welfare.

Then there is the positive aspect of caring, as seen in the shepherd’s relationship to the sheep. Jesus said, “I know My sheep, and am known by My own” (v. 14). Of course, we are reminded of those passages which indicate the Lord’s perfect and intimate knowledge of His own (Ps. 139; Matt. 10:30, etc.). We encourage those shepherds of local flocks of God’s people to know their sheep. Such is inherent in the very idea of shepherding, as is seen from Jesus’ description.

CONCLUSION

Could there be a more encouraging description of the Savior’s relationship to His people than that of the Good Shepherd? May we respond to His care and leading as true sheep, who hear His voice and follow Him. May spiritual shepherds in today’s church model their work after His great example.

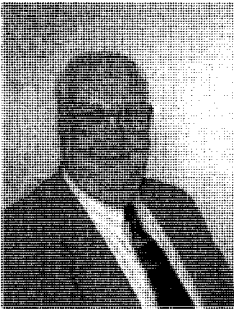
ENDNOTES

1. All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.
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PERSON-TO-PERSON WITH JESUS

JOHN 3, 4

TOM MILLER



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When we think of Jesus as the Master Teacher, we may think first of some of His great public discourses. In this regard, we think almost immediately of The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, or maybe it is the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25 that comes to mind. We must not forget, however, Jesus was also the Master Teacher in His person-to-person interviews. The Gospel of John especially emphasizes this aspect of Jesus' ministry. Merrill C. Tenney says, "There are no less than twenty-seven interviews between Jesus and some person or group in the Gospel of John."¹ Tenney continues:

The pattern of the interviews is quite uniform. On each occasion, someone was brought into contact with Jesus; Jesus made an inquiry or comment revelatory of the other person's character; and the resultant effect was either belief or unbelief.²

In this lesson, we will turn our attention to two of the better-known personal interviews Jesus had with individuals in chapters 3 and 4 of John; that is, Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. In these examples, we will note the differences between them, and we will draw some lessons that will help us to be more like the Master Teacher.

NICODEMUS

We begin in John, Chapter 3, with a brief look at Nicodemus. Verse One tells us some important facts about him: he was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. The fact that he was a Pharisee identified him as one of the “separated ones,” a member of the strictest sect of the Jews. The fact that he was a ruler of the Jews probably indicates that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, which we might call the Jewish Supreme Court. Taken together, these two facts indicate he was a well-known, influential, religious individual.

In talking about Nicodemus, most people have wondered why he came to Jesus by night. The common explanation is he was afraid to be seen in the light of day, coming to talk with Jesus. This may be, but it is only conjecture. Frank Pack observes, “[I]t may reflect the common practice of meeting at night in order to study and converse about the law.”³ Why he came at night is not nearly as important as the fact that he did come to Jesus, the only One who could provide him with life-giving answers.

Nicodemus recognized Jesus as a great teacher. “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”⁴ Prior to this, only one specific sign is mentioned, that is the turning of water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee (2:1-11). John 2:23 does mention, however, other unspecified “signs which He did.” Nicodemus knew about these wondrous works and knew they indicated Jesus was no ordinary man and no ordinary teacher.

As John records this interview, no question is asked on the part of Nicodemus. In the text, Jesus strikes immediately at the heart of the matter and says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless

one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Jesus knew that Nicodemus’ main problem, like that of other Jews, was that he trusted in his physical birth (cf. John 8:33).

What Nicodemus needed to do was stop trusting in his physical birth and be born again. Nicodemus, however, did not understand the new birth. He, like many then and now, was too earthly minded. The idea of being born again just did not compute with him. He asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4).

William Hendriksen has well said, “Nicodemus, as if to show the absurd character of the saying, takes the most absurd case: one certainly cannot conceive of the idea that an old man would actually have to be born all over again!”⁵

Jesus’ answer was, “Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). There have been a variety of interpretations given to this statement by Jesus. Many denominational preachers have understood “water” to refer to a physical birth and “Spirit” to refer to a spiritual birth. They talk about the fact a child is enclosed in water, or amniotic fluid, in the mother’s womb, and all of us – in that sense – are born of water. In addition, they say, Nicodemus needed to have a spiritual birth.

Warren W. Wiersbe takes this position and has written, “To be ‘born of water’ is to be born physically (‘enter the second time into his mother’s womb’) but to be born again is to be born of the Spirit.”⁶ Obviously this is an attempt to avoid any reference to baptism, and Wiersbe clearly says that.

Jesus was not teaching that the new birth comes through water baptism. In the New Testament, baptism is connected with death, not birth; and no amount of physical water can effect a spiritual change in a person... Water baptism is certainly a part of our obedience to Christ and our witness for Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:41). But it must not

be made an essential for salvation; otherwise, none of the Old Testament saints was ever saved, nor was the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43).⁷

It is difficult to see how one could miss the point so badly. Only one preposition is used with both water and Spirit. Jesus is not talking about a physical birth but a new birth. Nicodemus had already been born once, i.e., physically, but he needed to be born again, i.e., spiritually. That new birth involved water and Spirit. In other words, “water” and “Spirit” both replace and explain what it means to be born “anew.”

In contrast, the view most often held by our brethren is that the water of John 3 refers to Christian baptism. I grew up hearing preachers preach on this text. They would explain the Spirit’s part had to do with the Spirit-inspired word, which is the seed of the new birth. Passages such as 1 Peter 1:22-23 were used to support this. The water part was a direct reference to baptism and was the coming forth to a new life in Christ. Passages such as Romans 6:3-4 were used to support this part of the equation. As C.E.W. Dorris put it, “The Spirit is the active agent, the water the instrument of the birth.”⁸

While I agree that “water” in the text has to do with baptism, I do not believe that Nicodemus understood it to refer to the baptism of the Great Commission. Whatever it referred to, Nicodemus was expected to understand it. Jesus asked him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things” (John 3:10)?

I believe Coffman is on target when he writes:

At the time Jesus revealed this teaching to Nicodemus, the great commission had not been given; and the immediate application of the teaching to Nicodemus regarded John’s baptism which was mandatory for all the followers of Jesus prior to the resurrection ...⁹

Brother Coffman continues by saying that Jesus' words anticipated the great commission and made the passage equally applicable to people today.

What I believe Jesus is saying to Nicodemus is he must go to the Jordan to be baptized, just like any other person at that time. He also had to stop trusting in his physical birth and trust in a new, spiritual birth. To Nicodemus, being one of God's covenant people had to do exclusively with his birth as a Jew and thus a descendent of Abraham. Jesus wanted him to know, however, a spiritual birth was necessary for those who would enter the kingdom of God. A physical birth could never give spiritual life.

Paul also connects water and Spirit together in Titus 3:5: "[B]ut according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

The rest of John 3 records more information about the new birth and quite a long discourse of Jesus to Nicodemus. We are left to wonder what Nicodemus did about what he heard. He is mentioned two more times in John. In John 7:50-53, he spoke up in defense of Jesus and defused a rather volatile situation. He asked a penetrating question to the Pharisees who sought to take Jesus, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" In John 19:38-42, he, along with Joseph of Arimathea, claimed the body of Jesus and prepared it for burial. Verse 39 says that he brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds."

These things would lead me to believe he became a follower of Jesus, though he might have been a "closet disciple." At any rate, Nicodemus' life was changed forever by his one-on-one interview with Jesus.

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

This brings us to a discussion of the Samaritan woman in John 4. Her story is very different from Nicodemus, but it is no less interesting.

At the beginning of chapter 4, Jesus is leaving Judea and going to Galilee. Verse 4 says, “and He needed to go through Samaria.” That was not a geographical necessity. In fact, most travelers from Judea to Galilee would not have gone through Samaria, although this would have been the shortest route.

Samaria was where the Samaritans lived, and they were a much-despised people. The Samaritans were a mixed race that grew out of the Assyrian captivity of the ten northern tribes that took place in 722 B.C. As is sometimes said, there was enough Jew in these people for the Gentiles to hate and enough Gentile in them for the Jews to hate.

Later in John, when the enemies of Jesus wanted to call Him an insulting name, they called Him a Samaritan (John 8:48). This shows how deep-seated and intense the feelings were toward these people.

As a result, most orthodox Jews would have detoured around Samaria – even though it took them on a much longer circuitous route – rather than going through it. But Jesus “needed to go through Samaria.” The necessity was God wanted the gospel taken to the Samaritans.

At “about the sixth hour,” which would have been about noon,¹⁰ Jesus and His disciples found themselves just outside the city of Sychar at Jacob’s well. Jesus sat down by the well (perhaps on the curbing around it), and the disciples went into the city to buy some food.

It was at this point Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman. She had come to draw water, although this was an unusual time for her to do so. Usually, water was drawn in the morning and in the evening, not in the middle of the day. This has led some to believe she would not have been welcome at the well when the other women came to draw water because of her sinful lifestyle. Coffman observes, “the social status of the women suggests that she might have preferred to go at a time when she would not have encountered the neighbors.”¹¹

It is at verse 7 that Jesus began a discussion with this woman by simply asking for a drink of water. She is certainly surprised by this request “for Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9). Pack explains, “The verb *sugchraomai* translated here *have dealings with* means ‘use vessels in common,’ since the Jews regarded Samaritan women as ceremonially unclean.”¹²

This woman knew the history. She knew how deep the feelings ran. Yet, Jesus would not be bound by that history and those feelings. He, a man, would speak to her, a woman. He, a Jew, would speak to her, a Samaritan.

Jesus countered her surprise by saying that if she knew who He really was that she would ask water from Him. That only served to confuse her. Like Nicodemus in the previous chapter, she failed to see the spiritual truth Jesus was teaching. He could not see a “new birth” for thinking of his physical birth. She could not see “living water” for thinking about physical water.

She said, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep” (John 4:11). She was right on both counts. He had no bucket or pot to draw the water with, and the well was very deep. After personally visiting the well, J. W. McGarvey wrote:

The well is a perfect cylinder, seven and a half feet in diameter, walled with stones of good size, smoothly dressed, and nicely fitted together, an excellent piece of masonry. Its depth was stated by the earliest modern who visited it (Maundrel) at 105' with fifteen feet of water. In 1839, it was found to be seventy-five feet deep with ten or twelve feet of water.¹³

After talking about the water He could give, Jesus asked the woman to go get her husband. She replied, “I have no husband” (John 4:17). She had had five husbands and was with a man presently to whom she was not married. Jesus knew that, but He was leading her to see He was no ordinary Jew. In fact, when she first met Him, she referred to him simply as a Jew (John 4:9).

However, in response to His knowledge of her personal life, she called him “a prophet” (John 4:19). Her faith was growing.

The discussion next turns to the matter of worship. The Samaritans had worshipped on Mt. Gerizim for centuries. Like their own heritage, their worship was syncretistic. They accepted the Pentateuch, yet they also worshipped idols.

Jesus taught her – and us as well – true worship involves worshipping God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). The place would not matter. It would not be Jerusalem for the Jews and Mt. Gerizim for the Samaritans. It could be anywhere, and it could be any people. What mattered was God was worshipped, and He was worshipped properly.

The woman’s faith reached its crescendo when she returned to her village and announced, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29). We are not left to wonder what the results of this one-on-one interview with Jesus were.

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. And many more believed because of His own Word (John 4:39-41).

A COMPARISON

These two stories are familiar to most of us. In reviewing them, we are struck with how unlike these two people were. The chart below may help put this in perspective.

NICODEMUS	SAMARITAN WOMAN
A Man	A Woman
A Jew	A Samaritan
A Wealthy Man	A Peasant Woman
A Religious Man	An Irreligious Woman

NICODEMUS	SAMARITAN WOMAN
A Highly Educated Man	An Unlearned Woman
An Honest Searcher	A "Happenstance?" Visitor to a Well
Someone Who Knew Something of Jesus	Someone Who Knew Nothing of Jesus
A Respectful Attitude	An Indifferent Attitude at First
A Highly Respected Jewish Leader	A Woman with a Sordid Past

The contrast is striking. Nicodemus is all the Samaritan woman is not and vice versa. It is in these differences we learn the really important lessons from these one-on-one encounters with Jesus.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

First, we learn Jesus had time for individuals. We tend to get caught up in large numbers. In the denominational world, we know of the large crusades of Billy Graham or the television ministry of Joel Osteen. We are told that "bigger is better."

In our own brotherhood, we are thrilled by the potential of taking the gospel to the world through Gospel Broadcasting Network in Chattanooga. Likewise, we see the potential of the multifaceted efforts – printed page, Internet, radio, and television – of *Truth for the World* in Duluth, Georgia. But, we must not let these large efforts keep us from seeing the value of one solitary soul.

Jesus put things in perspective when He declared one soul is worth more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26). Christianity is the religion of the individual. We become Christians as individuals (Acts 2:38). Though we may worship with a host of others, our worship must be our individual expression (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2). We will certainly face God in judgment as individuals (Rom. 14:12).

Yes, Jesus would preach His famous Sermon on the Mount to a large multitude, but He would also spend time with one person. We, too, must see the individuals along the way.

Second, we learn Jesus wishes all to be saved. Jesus had come to “seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). And, here were two lost souls. The soul of Nicodemus was no more important than the soul of the Samaritan woman. Jesus would have a late night interview with a respectable religious leader named Nicodemus in Jerusalem. And, He would have a noontime interview with a less than respectable Samaritan woman beside a well outside the city of Sychar.

We are often selective in those we want to teach. I remember the joy I felt in teaching and baptizing a family of four into Christ early in my ministry. They were quite poor and lived in a small tarpaper shack in Elkins, West Virginia. I also remember the agony I experienced when a member of the church said to me, “Don’t you think you should teach and baptize a little better quality of people than that?” Jesus would never have felt that way.

Every day in chapel at ETSPM, we close the service by singing #88 in our song book, “The Gospel Is For All.” The first verse says,

Of one the Lord has made the race, Thro’ one has come
the fall;
Where sin has gone must go His grace: The gospel is for
all.
The blessed Gospel is for all, The Gospel is for all;
Where sin has gone must go His grace: The gospel is for
all.¹⁴

We must believe that, and we must make sure we make the gospel available to all people – from the richest to the poorest, from the honest searcher to those we chance to meet by the way, and from the most respectable to the least respectable.

Third, we learn we must overcome obstacles to lead people to Jesus. Everyone comes with his or her own particular baggage. For Nicodemus, it was the fact he trusted in his heritage. He was, after all, a Jew and a descendent of Abraham. For the woman of Samaria, it was both her religious background and her

sinful life. For both of them, it was a slowness to grasp spiritual truths.

Jesus never said, "Nicodemus is too proud and self-righteous; he would not be interested." He never said, "This woman of Samaria has too sinful a past; she wouldn't be a good candidate." He saw them both as people who needed what He alone could give, and He patiently worked with them to bring them where they needed to be.

As we work with people, we will confront an increasing number of problems. The people we deal with are in the world, and they are influenced by the world. They have all of the world's problems in their lives. We have no private, protected room from which to get our prospects. We get them out of the world. And, so, they bring with them the baggage of religious error, immorality, divorce, a secular mindset – and the list goes on and on.

This is not to say we can ever compromise truth. We can never lessen God's requirements. But, we must recognize the baggage people have and be willing to work with them to help them overcome it.

Fourth, we learn Jesus began where these people were and led them to where they needed to be. This is why the accounts are different. He did not approach the Samaritan woman like He did Nicodemus. Jesus did not believe one size fits all in evangelism. He was much more direct with Nicodemus than He was with the woman of Samaria. As far as we know from the text, Nicodemus asked no questions. Jesus – in a very straightforward way – said to him, "You must be born again." With the Samaritan woman, Jesus made what we might consider small talk. He began by asking her for a drink of water.

Why the difference? These two individuals were different. They were at different places in life. Their understanding was very different. Jesus tailored what He did to the understanding and perceived needs of each individual.

One problem I have with some evangelistic methods is there is no room for customizing them. It is answer this question now. Ask this here. Do this at this point. Overcome this objection by saying this. People are different and must be approached differently.

Fifth, we learn great results can occur when we spend time with individuals. As stated earlier, I believe Nicodemus became a disciple, based upon the two mentions later in John about him. Also, I know many from Sychar became believers in Jesus because Jesus spent time with this woman.

If only Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman had been impacted by Jesus, it would have been significant. But, through these individuals, other individuals were impacted. Every person we teach opens up new opportunities.

I remember teaching and baptizing a couple into Christ early in my ministry. It would be difficult to calculate the number of people that has affected. I know their parents, their children, their siblings, and several of their friends were all impacted and became Christians themselves.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is indeed the Master Teacher. We can learn so much from observing His methods. In His one-on-one interviews – of which we have noticed two today – we see Him as a caring person who saw the value of just one person. He would meet them where they were and gently lead them to where they needed to be.

May we be and do the same!

ENDNOTES

1. Tenney, Merrill C. John: The Gospel of Belief. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), p. 313.
2. Ibid.
3. Pack, Frank. The Gospel of John: The Living Word Commentary Sweet Publishing: Austin, TX, 1975), p. 57.

4. All Scripture citations are from the New King James Version.

5. Hendricksen, William. John: New Testament Commentary (Baker Book: Grand Rapids, MI, 1953), p. 133.

6. Wiersbe, Warren W. The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 1 (Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1989), p. 295.

7. Ibid.

8. Lipscomb, David. Edited with Additional Notes by C.E.W. Dorris. A Commentary on the Gospel of John (Gospel Advocate Co.: Nashville, TN, 1968), p. 45.

9. Coffman, Burton, W. Commentary on John. (Firm Foundation Publishing House: Austin, TX, 1974), p. 80.

10. This is supposing Jewish time is being considered. The "sixth hour" would have been six hours after sunrise. If Roman time is being considered, it would have been about six o'clock in the evening. The events of later in the day, i.e., the people coming out of the city to meet Jesus and asking him to stay with them, suggest the noon timeframe.

11. Coffman, Op. Cit., p. 113.

12. Pack, Op. Cit., p. 72.

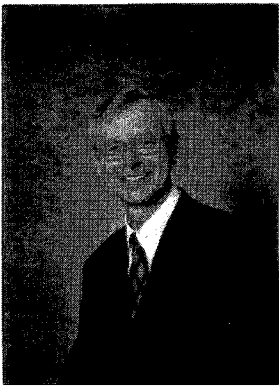
13. McGarvey, J.W. The Fourfold Gospel (Standard Publishing: Cincinnati, OH, 1914), p. 56.

14. The words of this song were written by J. M. McCaleb, a gospel preacher and missionary to Japan for more than forty years.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: “A STUDY OF DISCIPLESHIP IN LUKE”

LUKE 14:25-33

BOB COWLES



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WHO IS A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST?

One of the most difficult questions facing man in the 21st century is: “*What does it mean to follow Jesus?*” What does it mean to say that someone is a disciple of Jesus Christ? What does “following” Jesus entail, in terms of one’s daily life? If it seems strange that the question has to be asked, let me remind you of the variety of answers that can be given to it.

But does that work to settle the matter of discipleship for Christian identity? Hardly! Getting baptized and being a church

member are good things, mind you, but they are not the defining traits of a disciple. What does discipleship say about lifestyle? What about a church member who lies to people at work and cheats on his wife? Is that person "following Christ"? Not in any meaningful sense! That person's life does not honor Christ and brings him into disrepute among those who know that the person behaving so immorally and irresponsibly claims to be a Christian.

The essential meaning of the word disciple (*μαθητης*) is, of course, "student" or "learner." It is used consistently in the four Gospels to describe the relationship between Jesus and his followers. A good example is found in Luke 6:40, "*A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.*" A "disciple" is nearly always used in conjunction with the word, "teacher." A disciple is contrasted with a pupil because a disciple conforms his mind to that of his teacher. This attachment shapes the entirety of the disciple's life. It is the responsibility and privilege of the disciple to be like him. As they become like him, they will live to reproduce him in other people. **THIS IS THE GOAL OF DISCIPLESHIP – TO BE LIKE JESUS.** Edgar Guest said, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." Example is the primary way one trains disciples. Paul said, "*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1). A disciple must then ask himself, "What kind of a disciple will a person be if he imitates my example?"

The concept of "follower" is implied in the word disciple. In ancient Greece, a disciple was considered an apprentice. A disciple is not just a follower; he also serves as an apprentice under one who is more experienced. To be a disciple, one must have a teacher. Philosophers would gather disciples around them, and as they traveled, they would teach them. When the New Testament opens and people are identified as disciples of John or of Jesus, the terminology is not new. When Jesus' teaching attracted disciples, this was a natural response in the first century. If Jesus made anything clear to us, it is the fact that we must decide whose disciples we are. A person comes to be like what he loves, and grows to be like what he worships.

The word "disciple" continues in Acts, but here it ends. It is nowhere found in the rest of the New Testament. It is confined mainly to that time our Lord was here upon earth, to the time of personal encounter, when he called His disciples. At Acts 11:26b, there Luke writes: "*The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*" Clearly, Luke's commoner and preferred way of speaking of those who belonged to Christ was the word disciple; it occurs about 230 times in the gospels and about 30 times in Acts of the Apostles. We rarely use the word "disciple" to describe Christians today. We have almost completely moved to "brethren" and "Christians." Harvey Porter asks, "Have we lost something by not using the term "disciple?"

Church membership is one thing; however, discipleship is another. Tragically, we are long on membership and short on discipleship. Membership brings one in, but discipleship sends him back. We have committees, but not the committed. The book of Acts teaches about a movement of committed people evangelizing the world. People are afraid of discipleship – the claims are too strong, the price too high, the sacrifice too great! However, Jesus demands discipleship. The church today desperately needs discipleship.

Disciple and Christian can and should refer to the same person, but their meanings can also be different. Although they wear the name "Christian," which implies that they have been saved and are of the Christ, the anointed one, often their lives hardly measure up to the identifying characteristics of a "disciple," as described in the New Testament. In the early church, the disciples were called Christians, but the question for this study is: "*Can 'Christians' today be called disciples?*"

Thus, in its broadest and most inclusive meaning, the word today would include all those who "follow" or consider themselves "students of" Jesus. Disciples came to Jesus and attached themselves to him to learn the lessons that only He could teach. They ate with Him, slept by Him, walked and talked with Him every

day. Jesus was more than a teacher who put out a few lessons that they could take or leave. When they came to Him as His disciples, they were taking upon themselves His way of life. Character and eternal destiny were being formed by this teacher. He became the center of their whole existence. What He loved, they loved. Where He went, they went. What He gave up, they would give up. With this in mind, we can appreciate the demands He made on them and, consequently, on us. That personal attachment to the teacher must not be lost in this century, for we must remember that they who knew Him best were to “*go and make disciples of all nations...*” (Matt. 28:19, 20). We, too, have become His disciples by His teaching and know that He is with us unto the end. Christians have been perplexed with the problem of how to fulfill this commandment. The Great Commission cannot be done if it is not done in the manner of the Master, and His plan is to make disciples.

According to Milton Jones, discipleship involves three things: evangelizing, edifying, and equipping. He says that Jesus spent a great amount of His time in the training of twelve men. These followers were given the commission to “*make disciples.*” Wherever these believers went, they followed in the pattern of Jesus and the Twelve, and they made disciples. When Jesus asked the Apostles to “*go and make disciples,*” they knew what He meant because He was merely asking them to continue what He had practiced with them.

EVERYONE MUST CHOOSE

There are choices to be made in life, and some of those choices are anything but easy. Life is the accumulation of all good and bad choices one makes. But no one can avoid the responsibility of making decisions.

The Christian experience involves the most fundamental and radical of all decisions, the decision to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. There are not two decisions — to be a Christian and to be a disciple. To be a Christian is to be a disciple. “*He that is not with me is against me,*” said Jesus, “*and he who does not gather with me,*

scatters" (Luke 11:23). It is an all-or-nothing matter. The Christian decision, then, is not whether to be a disciple but what sort of disciple to be. One can be faithful or unfaithful, with Christ or against Him, gathering with Him or scattering. Everyone who decides to accept salvation pledges simultaneously to be a faithful follower.

In this lesson, we turn to an important matter of emphasis of the Bible. We will focus on discipleship. The Bible makes it clear that one's choice to believe on Jesus would be a revolutionary commitment affecting every aspect of life. Following Christ not only involves receiving something, but giving everything.

THE DEMAND OF DISCIPLESHIP
(A Study from the Gospel of Luke)

No one can repent and stay the same, for repentance is a wholehearted change of heart and life. When Christ calls a man, He bids him to come and die. Discipleship is conversion to Christ. Thus, repentance is at the very root of discipleship, and there is no discipleship without it. Once repentance begins, the person involved adopts a new perspective on life. The things Luke stresses in his Gospel combine to spotlight the truth that nothing less than a new attitude toward life is adequate for a Christian. As we examine the Gospel of Luke, it will become clear that discipleship is one of his most important themes. Luke tells his readers what it means to "follow" Jesus not only in the call and commissioning stories, but throughout the Gospel.

One's understanding of discipleship and one's ability to follow as a disciple are directly dependent on one's understanding of Jesus. As we examine discipleship, we will see that "following" Jesus has radical implications for one's attitude toward **possessions**, and that through His example Jesus calls upon his disciples to endure **persecution**. Jesus, the Servant of God and Son of God, said to His disciples, "*I am among you as one who serves.*" The disciple must adopt a lifestyle that follows Jesus' example of **service** to all. Jesus' real purpose of life revealed itself in the demands He placed upon

His followers. Jesus followed a very important principle of leadership in that He would not ask others to be what he was not. Jesus was a pace-setter in every aspect of His life, whether it was sacrifice, endurance, faithfulness, compassion, courage, or determination. As the ministry of Jesus unfolded, it became increasingly clear that He was calling His disciples to be like Him (Luke 6:40).

Of course, the same truth of Christianity's exclusivity and its demand of singular loyalty are found in the other Gospels. There is no attempt here to say that Luke teaches something the other Synoptics and John do not. But it is unquestionably a point of special emphasis with Luke. Even in the materials he shares with the other Synoptics, Luke has an emphatic way of telling certain things. He sometimes provides emphatic details that the other writers omit, or gives a literary twist to the telling of an event that effectively intensifies the story.

Take, for example, the call of the four fishermen to be disciples. Jesus called **Peter, Andrew, James, and John** by challenging them henceforth to be with him to "fish" for men. Both Matthew and Mark end the account with these words: "*At once they left their nets and followed him*" (Matt. 4:20; Mark 1:18). But Luke does not just say they left their nets and followed. Luke ends the account more emphatically by writing: "*So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him*" (5:11). Something very similar happens in the account of Matthew's being called to discipleship. Matthew, the tax collector, was sitting at his table receiving the taxes and entering amounts in his ledger books. Although the same story is told in the other Synoptic Gospels, Luke alone adds the detail that Matthew "left everything" and followed Jesus. It seems critical for Luke that his readers should understand what discipleship involves. When someone heeds the call to follow Jesus, he walks away from everything else to walk with Him. To what the other Gospel writers say about taking up one's cross and bearing it, Luke adds that the cross must be taken "**daily**" (9:23).

Matthew and Luke both tell of a series of encounters with

would-be disciples. Jesus warned one man who had said he would follow Him that the Son of Man, unlike even the foxes or birds, had no place to lay His head (9:57-58; cf. Matt. 8:19-20). Another said he would follow after first burying his father, and Jesus told him, "*Let the dead bury their own dead*" (9:59-60; cf. Matt. 8:21-22). Only Luke adds: "*Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.'* Jesus replied, '*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God*'" (9:61-62). Luke understood discipleship to be a call for unreserved surrender to the claims of Christ. He was at great pains to underscore this important teaching.

Luke, along with Matthew, preserves a bold statement from Jesus about hating one's closest relatives for the sake of discipleship: "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -- yea, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple*" (14:25-27; cf. Matt. 10:37-38).

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

Discipleship is not easy to understand in our culture. On the one hand, many of us have been stroked, pacified, and pampered so long, that we will not allow any demands to be made of us. If we think that anything is going to be expected of us, we run. On the other hand, there is the legalism, which is practiced in the name of commitment and discipleship. Both of these are misdirected approaches to a subject the Bible takes seriously and that we should understand as part of the meaning of Jesus.

In simplest possible terms, discipleship is loving the things Jesus loved, wanting the things He wanted, and doing the things He did. Jesus loved the Father. He loved the words of the Father found in Scripture, and He loved communion with the Father in prayer. He wanted to experience His Father's presence, so He spent time in solitude and meditation with Him. That tells us something about discipleship expectations for us. Jesus loved righteousness because

it gives glory to the Father. He wanted the experience of the kingdom of God to become a reality among men and women on earth. He prayed for it, and He tried to bring it about.

Jesus loved people made in the image of God, so He wanted the lost to be sought and found. He went among the lost and spent more time with them than with the power brokers of the religious establishment. When He was criticized for failing to live up to establishment expectations, He talked about how the sick need a doctor worse than healthy people. Jesus went where the hurting, the lonely, the hungry, and the sick were. He touched them. He fed them. He became involved in their lives. He allowed himself to be caught up in their pain and troubles. Whatever they were struggling with by virtue of their humanity, He was compelled to take to himself.

Discipleship to Jesus puts one in position to do the very same things He did: loving the Father and seeking Him in the Word, prayer, meditation, and getting involved with the poor, sick, and lost. This occasionally involves running into conflict with people whose religious concerns are fixed, institutional, and traditional. Discipleship also puts believers in situations where they will not be understood by people they are helping.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's oft-quoted statement about discipleship is this: "When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die." Discipleship is leaving everything that stands between you and Jesus. It is making a costly decision. It is valuing the gospel for what it is. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the gospel, which must be sought again and again, the gift, which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost

God the life of his Son: "*you were bought at a price,*" and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered Him up for us.

DISCIPLESHIP IS COSTLY

Luke 14 is Jesus' description of what a disciple really is. **Read Luke 14:25-33.** The most striking thing about these words is the phrase Jesus uses three times: "*cannot be my disciple*" (v.26, 27, 33). What a sobering thought! Who is willing to pay the price to be like him? Before answering too quickly we should reconsider just what the cost of discipleship is.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus' **first demand** for discipleship is that He must come before *the closest people in your life*. That is what He means when He says in verse 26, "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sister...he cannot be my disciple.*"

To follow Him, one must hate all other relationships. I like Matthew's version better. (Only in Luke is the wife mentioned. Rather than hate, Jesus says you must love Him more than the others). But this is Luke, where one must even hate self. In the language Jesus would have spoken, this word "hate" meant to renounce something. For example, the Old Testament records that God hates divorce. On another occasion, God hates the people's sacrifices. Hate is not an emotional feeling but a denunciation of a practice. In this case, to hate means to renounce all other allegiances and loyalties, as seen clearly in 18:29: "*There is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.*" The call is for one's allegiance to Jesus to be greater than any other object of one's affections. Jesus did not count equality with His Father something to be held onto, but emptied

Himself and became human, for the sake of the relationship. If we would be like Him, He must be first for us, just as we were first for Him.

Now we must interpret Jesus' words in light of other biblical teaching to cherish our families. Jesus is not calling for a sense of animosity, but for a sense of priority. To be a disciple is to choose Christ as Lord so unconditionally that all other loyalties become subordinate. Anyone who can pass this test is well on the way to becoming a disciple. Again, it was not because he no longer cared about his family, but because the call of Christ is to His disciples an even higher priority than the will of family. We must understand the demands of discipleship. Christ and His will must come first in every decision we make. That is what it means to be a disciple.

Are you a disciple? One way of knowing is by examining your closest relationships. You cannot choose your family, but you can certainly make choices, which will determine what your relationships will be like. Do your choices reflect that Christ is first in your life? Jesus Christ demands that we develop relationships that will enhance, not cripple, our being disciples.

Jesus' **second demand** for discipleship is that He must come before the dearest dreams for your life. Verse 27 reads, *"And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* Many have so misunderstood the cross, that most of us have trouble really understanding what Jesus meant. His listeners did not. They knew that if you saw a man carrying a cross, you would not be seeing him again. Crosses were not for jewelry. Crosses were for dying. I have a feeling that the crowd got smaller. The cross for Jesus was a deliberate choice of self-denial unto his own death, for the sake of the world. To follow Jesus, how high a price will we choose to pay in denying ourselves for the sake of others?

When Jesus talks, He speaks of a deliberate act of the will. A disciple makes the conscious choice to carry his cross. In other words, he makes the deliberate decision to live a life of continual

dying to himself so that he can continually live for Jesus. That is what Jesus demands. To all would-be applicants for discipleship, He says, "Do not follow unless you are prepared to die to self and its desires, goals, and ambitions. Every decision you make from now on must be made in light of my will." Choosing to deny self for Christ is what crosses are all about. Crosses are for people ready to die. And disciples must face that truth "daily" (Luke 9:23).

Then, in verse 33, we come to Jesus' **third demand** of discipleship. "*Anyone of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*" Can you not just see all the perplexed and worried looks on the faces of the crowd by now? No doubt, they wondered just what kind of kingdom that was going to be. For now Jesus was insisting that he must come before the finest possessions of their lives. We are called to renounce all that we have. Personal **relationships, self, and possessions** are the big three when it comes to determining who we are – our identity and our security. Jesus says that whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be His disciple. Whoever cannot place the Lordship of Jesus ahead of every other relationship, whoever cannot deliberately choose this allegiance over all others, whoever cannot walk away from any other personal possession for the sake of imitating Jesus, cannot be a disciple.

This **third demand** might be the most difficult to accept for those of us raised in the modern American culture. The message behind all commercials is always the same: want, buy, possess, own, or you will never be happy. I sincerely believe that we have been influenced by the blatant materialism of our age more than we realize. How many of us do not need to cringe a bit when we dare to echo Paul's statement. "*I have learned to be content in any and every situation*"? The truth is, we are not content. We have been trained all our lives to want, so we leave the pastures of the Good Shepherd to chase what we think we must have.

If only Jesus had stopped after that second demand, but He did not. Getting my discipleship in shape demands that I ask myself

some hard questions about my relationship to and need for material things. Certainly the problem is not in owning things, for the Scriptures are full of godly people who had great possessions. The problem is that tendency for things to begin owning us. Things are not to be loved for their own sake, but to be used for Jesus' sake. The disciple must decide that everything he owns must be secured by shallow tent pegs. In that way he can head quickly wherever his Master points and not be tied down to all his things that will not budge. If he cannot take it with him, he must decide to leave it behind. He understands that he himself is owned by Christ, and the true riches of the kingdom are things which cannot be bought, sold, or even seen.

Do you understand these things? Perhaps the real problem is not with understanding them, but with living them. If you would be a disciple, though, there are no other options.

COUNTING THE COST

In Luke 14:28-33, there are two parables unique to Luke. Both parables make a similar point about counting the cost of discipleship. These two parables show the importance of finishing what you begin. No one wants to start something and not finish it.

The first parable is about a farmer making a decision about building a tower. Yet, observed Jesus, a man planning such a project does not begin without counting the cost involved. Otherwise he stands to be embarrassed by beginning a project and having to abandon it without being able to finish.

Jesus understood how foolish such half-completed projects appear, and He did not want that kind of folly associated with His movement. That is why the terms are so strict. He was about the business of establishing and building a kingdom, and He was even now on His way to engage the enemy at Golgotha so He could do so. He looked ahead and counted the cost and saw that it would demand the laying down of His own life. How could His kingdom

thrive if His followers were not willing to do the same? He realized that what was needed was not more people *with* Him but more people *like* Him. What He needed was not fans but disciples.

The second parable is about a king who gets word that another king is coming against him with 20,000 soldiers, so the king does some quick calculations. He only has 10,000 men. Are they better trained and better armed? Can he withstand the larger army with his troops? He counts the cost. If he decides that it is hopeless, he will send somebody to negotiate terms of peace before the advancing army arrives.

In these two parables, Jesus is not trying to discourage the disciple, but is trying to get him to decide at the beginning whether or not he will finish the task. We have all witnessed people who have failed at tasks they started. Most of the time, it can be attributed to a lack of determination. Luke is always emphatic about discipleship. It is all or nothing. It is wholehearted commitment, and Jesus will not bear halfhearted trifling. Discipleship is all day, every day; otherwise it is simply not discipleship.

Counting the cost does not mean we can decide how committed we will be. It means deciding whether we will accept Jesus' one and only offer for complete commitment. For those wanting a little religion to round out their lives, Jesus has nothing to offer, for discipleship demands that Jesus comes before our finest possessions, our dearest dreams, and even the closest people in our life. Our task is not to decide the cost. Our task is simply to decide if we will pay it.

How much does it cost to be a Christian, a disciple of Jesus, in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 2006? What kind of commitment is necessary for one to say, "Yes, I am a disciple of Jesus!" How much does it cost? How much belongs to God, and how much really belongs to you? We find ourselves trying to be like Jesus. Yet, somehow we expect Christianity to be different. Put in one hour a week and be like Jesus! What is our real definition of commitment?

Or why is it that when the money gets tight, the first thing that loses out in the money crunch is church contribution? God understands, but the credit card people do not? If all the money is God's, how can that possibly be the right priority?

Lordship costs all that we have and all that we are. What in the world are we communicating to God about our allegiance to Him and His will for the church? And what kind of commitment to God do we have, if we have no commitment to the body of Christ, which He established? What kind of commitment is it when we are seldom here? What kind of commitment is it when, in the name of family, we use weekends as our getaway time? We set family over against the church? Never mind the messages unconsciously being fed to the children about the relativity of church, or that commitment to God has nothing to do with church attendance! Is that right? The collective meeting of the body of Christ takes a backseat to husband, wife, brothers, sisters, children!

Before I conclude my thoughts on this text, let me leave you with a couple of implications about Jesus' words that I hope will persuade you not to fall in with the half-hearted crowd.

The **first implication** is that *to follow Christ as anything but a disciple is thoughtless*. Notice that Jesus said, "*If anyone comes to me...*" Jesus laid out His terms very clearly and up front to encourage only the truly committed to participate. Only the truly committed build things that last.

The **second implication** of Jesus' words only further reinforces the things we have already considered. Notice how Jesus chose to close His address on genuine discipleship. "*Salt is good: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned. It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Luke 14:34-35).

The second implication of Jesus' words is *to follow Christ as anything but a disciple is worthless*. Now salt was a favorite

metaphor of Jesus for a believer's influence. The most obvious general characteristic of salt is that it is essentially different from the medium to which it is applied, and it is applied to that medium to improve it. If the salt was not different and therefore incapable of improving the substance on which it had been put, it was utterly useless. It was thrown out, not even being considered fit for the soil or the manure pile.

The same principle is true of disciples. Their power in the world lies in their difference from it, and the thing that makes them different is the absolute priority of Christ in every arena of their life, as clearly seen by the three demands we have already considered. Now if they do not pay that price, then, in spite of all their religious jargon, they are not significantly different from the world about them and therefore are unable to influence or improve it. They, like "unsalty" salt, are good for nothing. Now I know that is a strong thing to say, but I remind you that is not my comparison but the Lord's.

Jesus desperately desires for His church to get its discipleship in shape. It will never start at the congregational level, though. Such a revival must begin with individuals like you and me making deliberate choices to be disciples on Jesus' terms and not our own.

He asks no more than He gave. He asks a cross for a cross. Only as we consider His cross will we be motivated to take up our own. And as we follow, we are no longer just with Him; we are becoming more like Him. This is discipleship.

Are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? What have you sacrificed to be a person of integrity in this world? Tell me how you have remained loyal to the Lord when life turned against you, you lost your job, and your family was suffering. Tell me how much you love your wife and what you are modeling day by day for your children. Today, it is my task from the Lord to remind us all that both Jesus and the world want the proof of our faith in daily demonstration rather than mere words. That is the true cost of our discipleship. If

we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the risen Lord, we must obey Him and follow His example. Jesus commands His followers to *"take up your cross daily."* By both word and deed, Jesus taught His disciples the meaning of discipleship.

"He who has ears, let him hear."

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THE MODEL PRAYER

MATTHEW 6:9-13

DENNIS L. CURD



Dennis L. Curd was born in Union, SC. He has been married to Sandra Jean for twenty-eight years, and they have two children, Jennifer and Justin, and one grandchild, Nathan. Dennis has a B.S. degree in Biological Sciences from Auburn University (1977) and is a 1988 graduate of ETSPM. He has done local preaching in AL and VA, where he has lived and worked for the last nine years. He has done mission work in Ukraine, having made five trips to that country. Prior to his full-time preaching, he worked as a truck driver and served in the Army, working in a medical research facility. He enjoys woodworking, gardening and hiking.

One of the best known portions of the Scriptures is the one dealing with Jesus teaching His disciples to pray. Sadly, it is most often recited as the "Lord's Prayer," a memorized and repetitive utterance of what is presumed to be a prayer designed for such use. It is clear, however, that even in the context of what Jesus was discussing in this passage that He forbade such use of this or any other material. Jesus had just said, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathens do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7). As children often do when they are being taught to pray, learning a set prayer and using it until they learn to think on their own, many adults continue to mimic the words of Jesus as if that is what He expected of them.

The "model" prayer that Jesus gave in both Matthew and Luke's gospels is a model because it was given in response to a question from the disciples. They asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). Jesus

responded by saying, "After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matt. 9a). Jesus was clearly showing them a manner in which to pray, not specific words to recite on and on. It follows that the words Jesus used in teaching them to pray should be used as a summary or guide to prayer, rather than being a prayer in and of itself. The purpose here is to explore these words and to evaluate their use in learning to pray. If Jesus taught His disciples who were present at the time to pray in this manner, it is also true to extend that challenge to all future disciples.

Prayer is a constant in the Bible. How it is to be done, what needs to be said, how often it should be done, and even what position one takes during a prayer, are questions often contemplated by faithful people seeking the same thing as the disciples. How to pray is often made too complex or becomes too formalized, and thereby many feel as though their prayer lives are not what they should be. While it is true that our prayers can improve and should do so, prayer should be seen simply as communication with God. One communicates all the time in every area of life, and while it is not always perfect even among one's closest companions, usually one is successful in making his thoughts known. Is God not able to do the same? Can God not know the hearts of His people even when they fail to communicate with precision? Perhaps that is Paul's point in reminding us that the Holy Spirit affords intercession on man's behalf, thus enabling our thoughts to be known by God even when words fail (cf. Rom. 8:26).

The Bible is filled with statements that God has heard and will hear prayers. David said, "The LORD hath heard my supplications; the LORD will receive my prayers" (Psa. 6:9), and, "But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer" (Psa. 66:19). These and many other statements tell that God hears and that the speakers know they are being heard. What is not known in most cases is what the speakers actually prayed in their prayers. In others words, we rarely have the exact words of the prayers of Bible characters. The ones we do have, such as Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple (1 Kgs. 8), Daniel's prayer for the deliverance of Israel from captivity (Dan. 9), or even Jesus' own prayer the night of his arrest (John 17), are

very specific prayers for specific situations. While they are helpful in many ways in learning to pray, they are not especially instructive to one's daily need to pray.

What is significant about this lack of examples is perhaps simply that prayer is not to be repetitive and by rote. Prayer is to be personal and unique to the praying individual. This takes one's thoughts back to Jesus offering up a "manner" of praying rather than a prayer to pray. An examination of Jesus' instructions to His disciples will help to formulate a pattern of what to pray, an outline so to speak, for His disciples to keep in mind as they prayed.

Jesus' model consists of an introduction focused on Him to whom one prays, and concludes (at least in Matthew 6:13; KJV), with the word, "Amen." Luke does not include this ending, nor do the best manuscripts in Matthew, but it is clear that for a prayer to begin implies that it must end with or without a concluding remark. The body of the prayer contains four basic parts. The first is an acknowledgement of God's power and will. The second is the recognition of man's dependence on God. The third deals with the requirement to exemplify the nature of God in one's own life. And fourth, a request of God's help in procuring for man a safe passage spiritually through life is described.

Let us examine each portion of Jesus' model prayer. He begins with the addressing of the prayer to God the Father. "Our Father, which are in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9 b, c). Doubtless, prayer should begin with the perception of Him to whom one prays. Even the prayers of the heathen, that Jesus had spoken of before (Matt. 6:7), were addressed to someone or some power. Those who prayed to those entities believed that they were worthy of consult and adoration. Jesus points His disciples to the only real source of power, to the Father above. Yet, even these words are not the only ones that express the same pointed attention. Any address that properly calls God what His is, such as Lord, God, Jehovah, Almighty, or similar names, provides an address that takes one's prayer to the correct place. Such introductions to one's prayer, however, should never be flippant or condescending. This is evidenced by the rest of Jesus' introduction when He continues with the phrase, "Hallowed be thy

name” (Matt. 6:9c). One speaks of a historic battlefield as “hallowed ground.” Other places and events are referred to as being hallowed if they represent a sacred and profound feeling in those that contemplate their meaning. The word itself, though seldom used in modern speech, carries even in its sounding a solemn, quiet, and reverential quality. Maybe modern culture’s view of the word itself stems from the very passage under consideration. It is God’s name, or truly His power, that is hallowed. This is the standard of what is holy and consecrated. Holiness is defined by God Himself. One cannot pray to God acceptably when he has not “taken off his shoes, for this is holy ground” (cf. Exod. 3:5); figuratively in one’s own case not the removal of shoes, but recognition of where one stands. In prayer, one stands before the Lord of all, the most Holy God.

It would seem that once that fact is realized, prayer itself would become much more clear to understand as to its purpose. In other words, standing before God, one’s words should be carefully and thoughtfully uttered because they are truly spoken in His divine presence. There would be no room for caprice or foolishness. Imagine if one stood literally in the presence of God. What would one’s conversation be at that point? Consider Isaiah’s reaction as he even in a vision stood at the throne of God (Isa. 6:1ff), or Job as God spoke in conclusion of the matter (Job. 38ff). All arrogance and self-centeredness were gone. This humble contrition is what God wants from men, and it is to such that He offers a willing ear (cf. Isa. 66:2).

The first portion of the body of the prayer relates to God’s power and the invoking of His will. It begins with the statement, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10a). Clearly, the kingdom as described here was coming and was not yet present. It is to that end that Jesus came. “Jesus came... preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:14, 15). Mark would later record Jesus’ words, “That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). Jesus’ prayer model compelled the disciples to pray for its coming. It would truly come in its full glory on Pentecost (Acts 2). Yet, since it has come, should one’s prayer

now continue to pray for its coming? Some believe that the kingdom will yet come, failing to believe that the Bible declares its having already come (cf. Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9). Some believe that Jesus is telling the disciples to pray for the coming of the everlasting kingdom of heaven. The imminence of the kingdom, the church, to the time Jesus spoke, however, compels one to see that as the objective stated in the prayer.

The real nature of the statement, however, must be seen in light of the next portion of the prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b). The prayer here relates to one's desire for God's will to have its way and its effect. In principle, one prays acknowledging God's power and the inevitable completion of His will. Isaiah had said that God's word, or will, does not go forth without its action being completed (cf. Isa. 55:11). One's prayer must contain a clear understanding of who it is that rules all. Such submission to the work of God opens up the mental path necessary for the prayerful child of God to acquiesce to the Almighty will of God. God's will is done in heaven, and one prays that it will have the same effect in the hearts and minds of men in this world.

The second portion of the body of the prayer relates to man's dependence on God in the physical sense. The submission inherent in the first portion of the prayer clearly bears on this section. One who concedes to God's power and the working of His will must then realize that his own life is subject to the same. One's very livelihood can come about only by God's will being done. The prayer states, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). God knows that we have such physical needs (Matt. 6:32), and He readily supplies them to both the just and the unjust (cf. Matt. 5:45). What God wants from men is the realization of where those blessings come. One's prayer is not just to receive another bite of food or a bit of clothing, but rather to profess one's faith in God's providential care.

It is at this point that the prayerful individual concedes that despite the efforts he puts forth to labor and provide for himself, that the ability to live is a gift from God. As one contemplates that fact he is even more impressed with the benevolence of the

Father, “who gives good things to them that ask him” (Matt. 7:11). One’s total reliance on God is the critical point to be established when a prayer is offered.

The third portion of the prayer goes to the spiritual nature of one’s life. Man was created in the image of God to be minded like Him. Jesus had challenged this same audience with the statement, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). The demand to be like one’s Maker is critical to being acceptable in His sight. Forgiveness of one’s sins is the request of this part of the prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). Not only is the request made for God to forgive one’s sins (Luke 11:14; debts, Matt. 6:12), but to balance that request upon the contingency of one’s willingness to forgive others. This statement is explained after Jesus concludes the prayer model, by further stating in the context there that God’s willingness to forgive is to be characteristic of oneself (cf. Matt. 6:14, 15). Forgiveness is what He wants to do and is ready to do. If we are to be Godlike, we must behave toward those who have wronged us as God behaves toward us. Failure to do so will result in God’s unwillingness to forgive us.

In one’s prayer today not only is forgiveness enjoined here, but by extension all spiritual blessings that come from God. One’s prayer should extend to a full desire to receive and extend those “Christian graces” Peter so ably expressed (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Therefore, whether it be faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, or love, all of which are perfectly exemplified by God, one must exhibit them to be able to fully realize their personal effect on oneself. For example, to be loved one must be willing to love. John put it this way: “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is liar: for he that loveth not his brother who he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen” (1 John 4:20)? No attribute of God that is to be put on oneself is meant for one’s own personal satisfaction alone, but is meant to be extended to others around oneself. Then and only then, can one’s request for them be realized.

The last portion of the body of the prayer continues the thoughts relating to one’s spiritual condition. It deals not with past

things but with present and future things. Having dealt with the past by asking God for forgiveness, one must then face the fact of an uncertain and often foreboding time to come. Since one is unable to control the future, it must be conceded that God's involvement must be recognized. The prayer states, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13a). While the Bible states firmly that God tempts no man (James 1:13), it must be conceded that God also does not insulate man from sin. Sin has its effect on all men. While God does not remove its effect, He does provide a way of escape. Paul put it this way: "Therefore hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

God allows Satan to have limited power in the world. That power, however, has no effect on anyone unless he becomes open to its appeal. In other words, Satan cannot make one do anything against his will. The lust of a person can only become sin when it is acted upon and bears its fruit (James 1:15). It is here that God promises to provide a way of escape, and that way must be sought and embraced to succeed. The prayer, therefore, seems to acknowledge God's provision of escape and one's desire to be able to see the way and take it. God will deliver the faithful from evil but not unless he is willing to seek God's deliverance.

The nature of the entire prayer comes down to the resolution of the sin problem. One who humbles himself before God, trusting in His benevolence, desiring to be conformed to the knowledge of His will, he will be in the proper mindset to recognize sin and find the way of escape. This effect in one's life comes from the constant interaction with God by means of prayer.

The model prayer of Jesus was intended to teach those disciples present as He spoke to pray and was also intended to be instructional for all future disciples. With His words in mind, as well as all the other examples of prayer in the Bible, one formulates a mindset toward prayer and then puts his own words into prayer at any given moment. Prayer is intended to be a personal

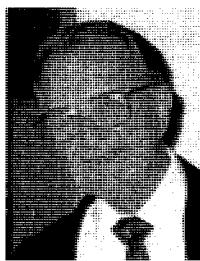
communication with God that has no precise formulation of required words, but nonetheless, has to be offered with humble reverence and contain key ideas that declare God's providential care and his Almighty power. Yet, even with the ingredients included in the "model" prayer, God allows great latitude in how one prays regarding the exact wording. What God wants from His children is a heart offered voicing of the thoughts and needs of the moment, specific to the individual and the occasion of the prayer. One will not be heard for his "much speaking" but rather for his sincere expression.

Prayer is an integral part of the faithful child of God's life. It should be a constant demonstration of one's desire to be in contact with God above (cf. 1 Thess. 1:17). God knows His people and the heart that they approach Him with, but He also wants to hear their thoughts and intentions expressed with reverence and sincerity. When such is received, the faithful can be assured that a God who cares and acts is present. Jesus' example of how to pray teaches one that precise point.

THE WEDDING FEAST

MATTHEW 22:1-14

BILL NICKS



J.W. (Bill) Nicks was born in Nashville, TN. He attended Freed-Hardeman College, Memphis State College, and Abilene Christian University. He has worked in churches in Berclair, Memphis, Woodbury, Oak Ridge, Savannah, Paris, and Claxton, TN. He served as Director and faculty at ETSPM and FHU and has done mission work in Nigeria, Liberia, Bahamas, and Trinidad. He is married to Gerry Petty, and their children are Rebecca Gross (deceased), Jeannie Crocker, and Sue Parsons.

Jesus did not answer an argument of the Scribes and Pharisees, nor a question from them, but, because "He knew what was in man" (John 2:25), He "answered and spoke to them again" because of the malice they displayed in the preceding parable of "The Vineyard" (Matt. 21:33-46). Jesus knew that "when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet" (Matt. 21:46). This explains why He taught the parable of the Marriage Feast, which follows immediately in Matt. 22:1-14.¹

In this poignant parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a "king who arranged a marriage for his son" (Matt. 22:2). Marriage feasts were happy, joyful occasions, with the finest attire of both bride and groom and their attendants. Especially was this so in regard to a king for his son. A king would arrange wedding feasts for his son with royal robes for each guest, and the finest foods and wine. Jesus knew about wedding feasts since he had attended one at Cana in Galilee and had provided by a miracle the wine for the occasion when it ran out. The governor of the feast said, "Every man at the beginning sets

out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now" (John 2: 10). Since it is plain that the King is God, and His Son is the Lord Jesus Christ, the wedding feast (*gamos*) is the church Jesus is to begin on Pentecost. His servants are the apostles and New Testament prophets. They were to "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). They were to begin "at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

The first servants probably refer to the apostles who were sent out on the Limited Commission to the Jews only. But "they were not willing to come" (Matt. 22:3; 10:6). At this time, the church was not yet established, but John the Baptist and the apostles preached unto the Jews who were told to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matt. 3:8). Although "all Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to John and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins," (Matt. 3:5, 6) it is evident that their tree did not bear good fruit [and was] cut down and thrown into the fire (Matt. 3:10). The other servants were the apostles under the Great Commission who went into all the world with the gospel message, "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The provisions made by the King were elaborate, demonstrating that the provisions of mercy are very generous under the Great Commission of Christ. The oxen and the fatlings represent the "great salvation" (Heb. 2:3) which three classes of people "made light of it and went their ways:

1. One to agriculture,
2. One to his business, and
3. The rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them" (Matt. 22:5, 6).

This shows how men are prone to let farming and business take precedence over the Lord's work. It is easy to say, "I am too busy" and leave no time to pray and worship God. Many will be lost in the judgment who did not stop and count their blessings and give glory to God by "seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). The country people must tend

their fields and the city people must keep their shops open and make exchange. They must "buy and sell and make a profit" (James 4:13). It is true that both city and country folk must be "not lagging in diligence" (Rom. 12:11), but not so as to keep them from making religion their main business. "These lawful things undo us...when we are so 'careful and troubled about many things' so as to neglect 'the one thing needful.'"² The people who "make light of it" (*arneleo*, to not care for, to neglect)³ are the ones who just do not care. Whatever of the world we have in our hands, our care must be to keep it out of our hearts, lest it come between us and Christ. "We must not allow agricultural or commercial employments, in which the love of riches, and application of the means to acquiring them, to stifle all thoughts of salvation."⁴ The third class is the man who is openly unjust, an outrageous sinner by profession, who not only neglects his salvation, but violently treats those who bring to him the gospel of reconciliation. This class is represented by the rest who "seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them" (Matt. 22:6).

The king understandably was "furious" and "sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their cities" (Matt. 22:7). Long before Jesus came to the earth, Manasseh had "shed innocent blood in Jerusalem, which the Lord would not pardon" (2 Sam. 24:4). The same sin brought "wrath... to the uttermost" (1 Thess. 2:16) when they "killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets" (1 Thess. 2:15). God, in His wrath, sent the Roman army of Titus, the army of the Lord of Hosts, who uses whomever He pleases to do His work, though "he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so" (Isa. 10:7). Isaiah said this of Assyria who conquered Samaria, but threatened, "as I have done to Samaria and her idols, Shall I not also to Jerusalem and her idols?" (Isa. 10:11). The Lord used the army of Titus to "burn up their city" [Jerusalem] (Matt. 22:7) 40 years after Jesus (Matt. 24:1f). It is set forth as an example for all to see, especially those who would oppose Christ and his gospel.

Since those invited were not worthy, the king then sent his servants "into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding" (Matt. 22:8, 9). The Jews had rejected Christ, so the servants went to the Gentiles, who filled the "wedding hall" (Matt.

22:10). The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison, having preached to the Jews in Rome. When "they did not agree among themselves" (Acts 28:25), Paul showed by the prophet Isaiah that "the hearts of this people have grown dull" (v. 27), "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" (Matt. 28:28).

"When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment." When ministers of the gospel cast the "dragnet" they gather in all kinds, both "good" and "bad" (Matt. 13:4ff). Jesus saw the hypocrite, represented by this man without a wedding garment. "These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves" (Jude 12). The man was "speechless" (*ephimoo*, to muzzle, silence)⁵; he was muzzled! The time is coming when all hypocrites will be held accountable for sitting in church without Christ, whose "feet" should have been "beautiful" (Rom. 10:15), and whose hearts should have been "sanctified" (1 Cor. 1:2) while partaking of the "Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). "How did you come in here?" (Matt. 22:12). This would be a good question for all Christians to ask. Did I come in by the "door"? If not, I am a "thief and a robber" (John 10:1). If my heart is not right with God, I am condemned by my own conscience, and will not have a word to say in my defense in the judgment (Matt. 5:8).

The punishment of this man was eternal. The king (God) said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13). "The son of man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:41, 42). Those who profess to be Christians but fall short of it, will be eternally separated from the "wedding Supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7), because they are not "arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:8).

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). It is sad that relatively few will be privileged to attend this "marriage

supper." The gospel call is for all (2 Thess. 2:14), but only the few will accept. "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13, 14). Why is it that the majority choose the "broad road" that leads to destruction? Because it is the line of least resistance. There are no temptations to overcome, no battles to fight, and no victories to be won. But they will be forsaken by God forever, some because of "unbelief" (Heb. 3:19), some because of "disobedience" (Heb. 4:6), some because of "fornication" (1 Cor. 5:1), and some, like Demas, because they "loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire' (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

But the "few" ("few" compared with the billions of people who have lived, who live now, and who will live) choose to enter the "narrow gate" and walk the narrow road that leads to eternal life "in the world to come" (Mark 10:30) are a "great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Rev. 7:9, 10). Their clothing will be white because they have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). "The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their

eyes" (Rev. 7:17) God promises to them, "I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you!" (Heb. 13:5).⁷

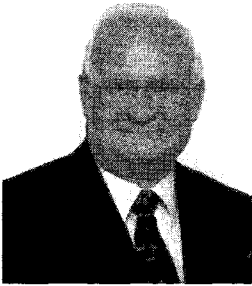
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TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

ACTS 1:1-3; JOHN 13

ROD RUTHERFORD



Rod Rutherford obeyed the Gospel in 1953 and began preaching in 1960. He attended David Lipscomb University, Memphis School of Preaching, and SCU. He married Brenda Luttrell in 1963. They have three children and eight grandchildren. All the children and their marriage partners are faithful Christians, as are the grandchildren who are of the age of accountability. Rod has preached in TN and AR, served as an elder, and done mission work in Zambia and Australia. He helped found *Truth for the World*, a media work sponsored by the church in Duluth, GA. He has also taught in several schools of preaching.

Quintilian, an ancient teacher of rhetoric, defined oratory as “a good man skilled in speaking.”¹ Batsell Barrett Baxter suggested that “The most vital element in the persuasion of a congregation is the person who stands in the pulpit. In turn, the paramount qualification of the man in the pulpit is his Christian character.”² Many highly talented and well-trained teachers and preachers have failed miserably because their personal lives did not measure up to the holy message they proclaimed.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our perfect example in all matters pertaining to life and godliness (1 Pet. 2:22-23; 1 Cor. 11:1). He not only taught the highest moral standard ever known to mankind, but He practiced everything He professed to the utmost degree. Not even His most inveterate enemies could ever substantiate a charge of wrongdoing against Him even though they desperately tried (Matt. 26:59-61; 27:24).

Luke began the second part of his two-fold treatise to Theophilus by reminding him that "The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1)³ The Lord well understood that a teacher must first "internalize" his message and then express it in his life before he can effectively teach it to others. In this, Jesus was following Ezra, the "ready scribe in the Law of the Lord," who "had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

The religion of Christ requires that not only must one believe correctly, but he must also live correctly. Jesus concluded His magnificent Sermon on the Mount with this very point:

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall (Matt. 7:24-27).

The Lord remonstrated with some of His would-be disciples by pointedly asking them, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not the things which I say" (Luke 6:46). In a similar vein, James, the Lord's brother, admonishes Christians to "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). Jesus also condemned the supercilious scribes and proud Pharisees, not so much for what they taught, but for their failure to practice themselves that which they bound on others. He warned His disciples:

Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not according to their works; for they say and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on

men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers (Matt. 23:3, 4).

Jesus does not require His disciples today to make any sacrifice He has not already made, neither submit to any commandment He has not already submitted to, nor follow where He has not already gone.

JESUS TAUGHT BY DEMONSTRATION

The apostles of Christ were privileged to be His constant companions for three years, to hear His marvelous teaching, see His amazing miracles, and witness His perfect life under every circumstance, yet they remained spiritually ignorant and immature. The fault lay not in the Lord, but in their preconceived ideas about the Christ and His kingdom. Like the rest of the Jews, they were expecting an earthly kingdom. Therefore, they anticipated having high positions in this kingdom once it was established. It was not until the Lord had ascended back to Heaven and sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles that they came to a full understanding of the mission of the Christ and the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

One instance in which the spiritual immaturity of the apostles is clearly seen occurred on the road to Jerusalem as the final week in Christ's earthly ministry drew near. The mother of Zebedee's sons, James and John (Matt. 4:21), approached the Lord with a request on behalf of her sons: "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left, in your kingdom" (Matt. 20:21). Not only did James and John not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom, but they also failed to understand the concept of service and how to achieve true greatness in the kingdom. Jesus corrected their misconceptions by saying:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the

Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25-28).

The rest of the apostles were greatly displeased at the petition of the mother of James and John. Most likely their resentment was stirred because they themselves coveted the positions of authority and pre-eminence in Christ's kingdom. Luke records that even during the Last Supper in the upper room "there was also a dispute as to which of them should be considered the greatest" (Luke 22:24-27). Jesus asked them, "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:27).

An opportunity for the Lord to enforce by personal demonstration His teaching regarding true greatness by means of humble service came during the eating of the Passover meal. The account is found in John 13:1-17. Later that same night, our Lord would be betrayed by one of His own apostles, arrested, tried, and condemned on the testimony of false witnesses. The following day, He would be severely scourged and cruelly crucified for the sins of the whole world. In light of what He knew lay in store for Him, Jesus desired to eat this last Passover meal with His beloved friends and be comforted by the communion of their companionship. This was not to be. The spirit of rivalry and jealousy marred this sacred occasion. Apparently, the ill feeling was so great among the apostles that a simple act of common hospitality, the washing of feet, was neglected.

Footwashing was an ancient custom going at least as far back as the time of Abraham some two thousand years before. When the three angels visited Abraham and Sarah at their tent in the Plain of Mamre, Abraham begged them to enjoy his hospitality: "Please let a little water be brought and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree" (Gen. 18:4). When two of the angels continued on to Sodom to warn righteous Lot of the impending destruction of that wicked city, Lot invited them to "spend the night, and wash your feet" (Gen. 19:2). After the establishment of the church of Christ, the apostle Paul

commanded that a widow should not be enrolled in the special number of those supported by the church unless she had "lodged strangers and washed the saints' feet" (1 Tim. 5:10). It is obvious from the connection Paul makes of joining "the lodging strangers and the washing of saints' feet," that he is speaking of hospitality. If a woman had not opened her home to receive both Christians and non-Christians, then she was not qualified to be part of the special number of enrolled widows.

In the ancient world, people traveled mostly on foot. If they had shoes to wear, they were simple sandals which consisted of a piece of leather for the sole and a couple of straps to bind them to the feet. Many of the roads were rough, unpaved, and poorly drained. They were dusty in the dry season and a sea of mud in the wet season. Therefore, it was an act, not only of cleanliness, but also of kindly consideration, for a homeowner to provide water by which a guest might wash his feet at the end of a long, weary, and dusty journey. In Jesus' time it was customary for a household servant or slave to perform the act of washing the feet of guests. If the host were not wealthy enough to afford a servant, he would perform this menial task himself.

Because of their worldly ambition, unholy rivalry, and selfish pride, not one of the apostles would lower himself to wash the dirty feet of his fellow apostles. Apparently, it did not enter their narrow minds that in refusing to wash one another's feet, they also failed to wash the feet of their Lord and Master.

During supper as the apostles reclined at the table, Jesus quietly arose, laid aside His outer garment, took a towel with which he girded His waist and a basin of water, and began washing the dirty feet of His recalcitrant disciples. Imagine the shame, chagrin, and embarrassment of the apostles, as their Master and Lord did for them what they in their pettiness had refused to do for one another, or even for Him! Visualize the strained silence as each apostle in turn reluctantly submitted to the Lord's ministrations. Impetuous, outspoken Peter strongly protested. He was shocked that his Lord would even consider washing his feet and exclaimed: "You shall never wash my feet!" The Lord replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me!"

Peter then, with his usual tendency to go overboard, said: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head" (John 13:8, 9).

The lessons on humility Jesus had earlier taught in word, He now demonstrated in act. He further drove the lesson home by saying:

Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me 'Teacher,' and 'Lord,' and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you (John 13:12-15).

The old English commentator, Matthew Henry, made an interesting point. He considers Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet to be symbolic of His humiliation in leaving behind His heavenly home, coming to earth and taking upon Himself the form of a creature, and then submitting to the horrible death of the cross.

Many interpreters consider Christ's washing His disciples' feet as representative of His whole undertaking. He knew He was equal with God, and all things were His; and yet He arose from the table of His glory, laid aside His robes of light, girded Himself with our nature, took upon Himself the form of a servant, came not to be ministered to, but to minister, poured out His blood, poured out His soul to death, and thereby preferred a laver to wash us from our sins.⁴

FOOTWASHING, A CHURCH ORDINANCE?

Did Jesus establish the washing of feet as a church ordinance, a religious ritual to be observed by His disciples in all succeeding generations? Some denominations such as the Primitive Baptist Church (often commonly referred to as "footwashing Baptists") assert that He did.⁵ Therefore, they incorporate the washing of feet into the service of the church.

They argue that it is as binding as the Lord's Supper and often practice it in their worship in conjunction with the communion. Guy N. Woods has aptly commented: "The literal act was for the purpose of removing actual dirt from the feet; but it was intended to symbolize for all future generations humility of spirit and the necessity of performing the most menial acts of Christian service."⁶

There are a number of reasons New Testament Christians do not practice footwashing as an act of worship or as a religious ritual. First, the context of John 13 makes it clear that Jesus was not instituting a binding ordinance, but simply using an act of common hospitality to drive home a lasting lesson on the spirit of humility and service which His apostles badly needed, and which must characterize His disciples in every generation.

Second, after the church of Christ was established on Pentecost, both examples and precepts are given for its worship, but no mention is ever made of the washing of feet as a part of the pattern of praise which God requires (Acts 20:7).

Third, footwashing is mentioned only one other time in the New Testament (1 Tim. 5:10). It is plain that this refers to an act of simple hospitality and not a church ordinance. The fact that a widow had entertained strangers in her home and washed the saints' feet is simply saying she has been hospitable to both saint and sinner, and therefore is worthy of being enrolled in the special group of widows supported by the church.

Fourth, there is no command ever given for keeping the act itself as a church ordinance. Please note that the Lord did not say, "Do what I have done." He said, "Do as I have done" (John 13:15). He commanded the spirit of His actions, not the act itself!

Fifth, those who turn this wonderful demonstration of humble service into a ritual to be mechanically followed miss the whole meaning of the lesson Jesus taught. J. W. McGarvey puts the issue in perspective and summarizes well why saints should not take the Lord's demonstration of humility and turn it into a mere religious ritual.

It is well known that many, by a literal construction of the passage, have esteemed it to be their duty to wash each other's feet in their churches. But it should be noted that in the entire New Testament there is no command for this, nor is there any passage which recognises any such church ordinance or practice. Jesus did not institute feet-washing. He merely found it already a familiar custom of the land, and merely used it as a most appropriate way of showing the proper spirit of humble service. Hence He does not say 'Do what I have done,' but 'Do as I have done,' which required us to do something similar to that which Christ had done, but not necessarily the same thing. The washing of feet as an act of courtesy or hospitality was never a custom among Western people, and to adopt it because of these words of Christ is to entirely miss His meaning. But what we would do if we followed His words literally would be to introduce a strange, outlandish practice, which would put a guest to great embarrassment and inconvenience.⁷

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God and Saviour of man, has left His disciples a perfect example. He is the Master Teacher because He not only taught, but He lived what He taught! His very life was a living demonstration of His doctrine. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus effectively used a common, everyday act of kindness and made it a living demonstration of His verbal teaching on true greatness and how it is to be achieved. The Master Teacher, though Lord of all, became the servant of all, that we might have the promise of everlasting life with Him. His timeless words still ring out today to a world and even a church filled with egotistic, self-centered, self-serving individuals: "Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16).

What about you? Are you a servant of Christ? We enter His service through obedience to the Gospel (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:38). We remain in His service by faithfully following His spirit of humility. If one has the humility of Christ, it will express itself in humbly submitting to His every command and gladly giving of oneself to His service.

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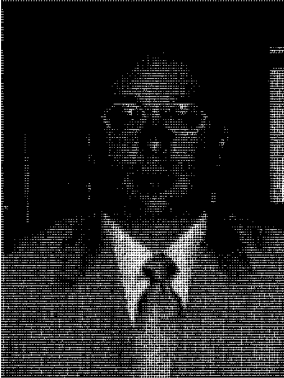
SECTION III

ALUMNI

EVANGELISM

MATTHEW 28:18-20

NEIL RICHEY



Neil Richey is a native of Tennessee, born in Jackson. He is married to Emily (Martin) of Salem, VA. They have one son, Peyton. Neil received his education from the University of Memphis, FHU, ETSPM, and Theological University of America. Neil is the preacher for the Augusta Road Church of Christ in Greenville, SC. He is a co-assistant editor and designer for *House to House/Heart to Heart* and co-assistant editor and co-treasurer for the *Carolina Messenger*. He has preached in a number of states and one foreign country.

It is a joy supreme to be a part of this annual series of lectures, and to have this chapter included in the book. Appreciation is extended to brother James Meadows, the lectureship committee, the elders, and the entire Karns congregation for this opportunity. Preaching the gospel is always a privilege.

INTRODUCTION

In Don Humphries' book, Hearts on Fire: A Strategy for Dynamic Evangelism, he quoted an older preacher who said, "If man has a soul, and he has, and if that soul can be won or lost for eternity, and it can, then the most important thing in the world is to bring a man to Jesus Christ."¹ Here is the question for you and me: Are we doing that?

Someone once penned these words: "The average member of the church of Christ has heard 4,000 sermons, sung 20,000 songs, participated in 8,000 public prayers...and converted zero sinners." Now, let me get into your heart—how close are you to the average?

About 2,000 years ago a man by the name of Jesus said this:

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).²

We affectionately refer to this portion of Scripture as the "Great Commission." But what makes it great? Consider four points straight from the text:

1. It (the "Great Commission") has the "authority" of heaven – "all power is given unto me" (v. 18);
2. It has a specific "assignment" – "teach all nations" (v. 19a);
3. It has a prescriptive "action" to fulfill the assignment – "baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things" (v. 19b-20a); and,
4. It has the "assurance" of the promise of God – "and, lo, I am with you always" (v. 20b).

While the church of our Lord must spend time in conservation – keeping the saved-saved, we must equally spend time in conversion – seeking and saving the lost. But who will go? It reminds me of the story about the father who told his son to go do something. The little boy told his father, "I ain't goin." The father corrected his son by saying, "No, son, it's 'I'm not going, they're not going, you're not going, or we're not going.'" The father asked his son, "Do you understand?" He said, "Yea. It sounds like ain't nobody goin." That is precisely the problem—we are not going.

So, what does it mean to be an evangelist? This term is only found twice in the King James Version – Acts 21:8 and 2 Timothy 4:5. (Parenthetical note: the term “evangelism” is never used in the KJV.) The word “evangelist” is from the Greek word transliterated *euaggelistes*. It is from *euaggelizo* and means “to announce good news (evangelize) especially the gospel: declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel).”³

For the purpose of this study, we will examine what it means to be an evangelist like *Jesus, The Master Teacher*. Over the course of this study, we will make only three observations. At the close of our study, we will note some practical pointers for personal workers. Our three main points will all be under the heading: *The Evangelist Like Christ Will*—1) Exploit Every Occasion; 2) Engage the Opposition; and 3) Exclude No One.

EXPLOIT EVERY OCCASION

When Jesus came into the well-known Samaritan city of Sychar, He approached a woman at the well and asked for water (John 4:1-11). This particular Samaritan woman was very engaging and was curious as to why a Judean Jew would converse with a Samaritan Jew. (Parenthetical note: any time one individual would break bread or drink water with another individual, it indicated a special level of fellowship.) It was on this particular occasion that Jesus taught a woman right where she was.

The Bible enlightens us to the Master teacher’s awareness of those around him—and, his taking advantage of those opportunities to teach. Let me give you four examples:

1. When speaking of those working in faithful service for the Lord, He delivered the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30).
2. When discussing the church in its foundational or preparatory sense (Matt. 11:12; 21:31-32; 23:13; Eph. 2:20; 4:11; Acts 2:47), Jesus took an opportunity to teach of the importance of brethren bringing other brethren to repentance (Matt. 18:12-20).

3. When He arrived in Jericho, Jesus immediately went to a publican (“a sinner of sinners”) and told him that salvation had come to his family (Luke 19:1-10).
4. When He was left hanging on the cross, He spoke words of forgiveness that were for all (Luke 23:34).

Now, here is Jesus’ personal message for you and me: “Go ye therefore...” (Mark 16:15-16). The better rendering would be “As you are going...preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

One man said it this way, “My profession is living for Jesus. I just sell insurance to pay expenses.” The evangelist like Christ will exploit every occasion.

ENGAGE THE OPPOSITION

The world famous violinist, Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, giving most of his money away. While on one of his tours, he came across an exquisite violin. Having no money at the time, he was not able to offer the asking price for the violin. So, he raised the money. When he went back to purchase the old violin, he was distraught because it had just been sold to a collector. Kreisler tracked down the collector. The new owner of the violin resigned himself to the fact that he would never sell the violin—it was his prize possession. Keenly disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when he had an idea. “Could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?” he asked. Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector’s emotions were deeply stirred. “I have no right to keep that to myself,” he exclaimed. “It’s yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it.”

Why do we grab the gospel with white-knuckled fists, unwilling to share what we have obeyed, with everyone, yea, even the opposition. Will we, with the same zeal as Mr. Kreisler, share what we know with the world?

Where did we ever get the notion that we should avoid trying to reach those in the denominational world? Who gave us the idea that those in denominational error are not interested in studying the truth? Have we forgotten that some of the greatest religious leaders of the first century became simple New Testament Christians – Paul, Nicodemus, Cornelius?

Someone wrote that those in religious error are a “rich spiritual vein” in need of mining. Again, I am reminded of Jesus at the well with the Samaritan woman. Were the Samaritans atheists? No. They were religious, or at least knowledgeable about religious matters. It was a Samaritan that said, “Art thou greater than our father Jacob...Our fathers worshipped in this mountain...The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh...” (John 4:12,20,25). The Samaritan woman was familiar with her religious heritage. She had even been informed of the coming of Christ. Yes, she was religious – but religiously wrong. (Parenthetical note: Jesus did not come to make anyone religious. He came to make all men religiously right (Matt. 7:21-23).)

What right, if any, do we have to keep the truth of Christianity to ourselves? The story is told of the Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, who was deeply hurt when his aunt did not take time to answer some questions that were troubling him. She stirred his emotions by telling him of Jesus’ crucifixion, but when he cried out, “Auntie, why did they torture Him?” she said simply, “They were wicked.” “But wasn’t He God?” Tolstoy asked. Instead of explaining that Jesus was indeed God, that He had become a man so He could die for our sins, she said, “Be still—it is 9 O’clock!” When he persisted, she retorted, “Be quiet, I say, I’m going to the dining room to have tea.” This left young Tolstoy greatly agitated. Commenting on this scene, Calvin Miler said, “Tolstoy found it incomprehensible that Christ had been brutalized and his aunt was not interested enough to stay a little past teatime and talk about it.” How much time are we willing to give up to share the good news, yes, even with the opposition?

The evangelist like Jesus will engage the opposition.

EXCLUDE NO ONE

The Lord reached into every heart that would listen. "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). "And he said unto them, Go ye into *all the world*, and preach the gospel *to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is *no respecter of persons*: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34, 35).

If we are going to be evangelists like Jesus, it will mean that we are not willing to leave anyone out. We will fight to break the barriers of race, social status, economic level, etc. Paul said, "I am debtor both to the *Greeks*, and to the *Barbarians*; both to the *wise*, and to the *unwise*" (Rom. 1:14). One brother said it this way, "Black, white, polka dot, doesn't make any difference. We've all got to repent." "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

There has never been a person alive whom God did not want to be saved. God wanted Jezebel to be saved. He wanted Hitler to be saved. He wanted Darwin to be saved. He wanted the 9-11 terrorists to be saved. He wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; cf. Matt 7:21-23).

Have you ever experienced a time when you felt that no one cared for your soul? David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, had such an experience. "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psalm 142:4). May it never be said of us that we did not care for the souls around us. The evangelist like Jesus will exclude no one.

PRACTICAL POINTERS FOR EVERY PERSONAL WORKER

1. *Begin right where you are.* First, you must know your Bible. What is your attitude toward Bible study? The Bereans searched the scriptures daily. They had an

insatiable desire to know the word of God. Second, you must know your student. Remember, you are the teacher. Every good teacher knows his students. When you begin a Bible study with someone, where do you start? You will have to ask some questions. "Do you believe in God?" "Do you believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God?" "Do you believe we must live by the Bible?" "Do you believe we will one day be judged by the Bible?" These are just sample questions. What is the point? The point is, you cannot begin a Bible study with someone by discussing the church of Christ, if your student does not even believe in God.

2. *Approach personal work as a job.* A good soul-winner is one who has the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). The mind of Christ on evangelism is this: every soul will be saved or lost. Therefore, every soul needs the gospel. Do your neighbors know that you are a Christian? Have you ever invited them to study the Bible with you? What about the waitress at your favorite restaurant? Have you ever invited her to attend worship where you do? What about the people with whom you work? Do they know that there is something more important to you than the "bottom line"—their soul?
3. *Be creative in your soul-winning procedures.* One of the best tools for evangelism today is *House to House/Heart to Heart*. It is a colorful, high quality, well-written and researched religious magazine. How do you use it? It can be mass mailed to your community. But there are many other ways to circulate this good material. I like to take it to my favorite restaurant and leave several copies at the front counter—you know, where people pay their bills. Another place I like to leave it is in the lobby of my doctor's office. When I go to the barbershop, there is a table where I can leave several copies. These are just a few places that I like to leave *House to House*. At Augusta Road, where I preach, one of our good deacons had several business cards made that have printed on them relative information to the Augusta Road Church of Christ. We leave them everywhere we go—restaurants, friend's

house, doctor's office, etc. Another one of our members collects leftover copies of the church bulletin on Wednesday nights. He then hands them out to those in his sphere of influence. He hands them out at the gas station, and around the block.

4. *Never, ever, never give up.* There are a number of ways that we can evangelize the local community. Some of them will prove to be successful, and will show immediate results. Others will seemingly fail. Still, there are other methods we will use, and the results may never be seen in our lifetime. The point is not necessarily how we do the work, but that we *WORK*. When it seems that our efforts are not producing fruit, let us not give up. Rather, let us remember the words of Paul, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

CONCLUSION

The story was told about a man who left his farm and went to Washington D.C. to spend a few days with his famous son, a United States Senator. One evening the father had the privilege of attending a social function where he met the Ambassador from Belgium. They had hardly properly greeted one another when the farmer asked, "Sir, are you a Christian?" The question was never answered, for the embarrassed senator interrupted and changed the conversation. Shortly after this farmer's visit with his son, the elderly man came down with pneumonia and died. Among the many flowers that were delivered to the funeral were some roses from the Belgian Ambassador. Attached was a note that read, "He was the only man in America who asked if I was a Christian."

One brother summarized evangelism this way: "I'm just a nobody, trying to tell everybody about somebody who can save anybody." That's it!

ENDNOTES

1. Humphrey, Don. Hearts on Fire: A Strategy for Dynamic Evangelism. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co. 1990.
2. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.
3. *euaggelizo*. Strong's Greek Dictionary. Power Bible C.D.

“I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

JERRY W. CARMICHAEL



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INTRODUCTION

A great and wonderful theme has been chosen for this series! How essential it is for God's people to concentrate long and often upon the teachings of Jesus, the Master Teacher. Of all the teachings of Jesus, perhaps the most significant are the lessons concerning the church of Christ.

Our assignment today is the discussion of a statement made by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 in answer to the doubts of the scribes and Pharisees. These religious leaders continued to ask for a specific sign to be performed for them, to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus pointed out, in answer to their doubts, that they possessed the ability to tell the weather by looking at the sky, yet they were not able to see from all the things that He had done, that He was indeed, the Christ (Matt. 16:2-4)! He had already had this conversation with them earlier, as recorded in Matthew 12:38-42. By this time in His ministry, He

had healed the sick, raised the dead, and driven out demons before the multitudes, yet they still wanted a specific sign! He explained that they were a wicked and adulterous generation by asking for more than what they had already seen. He told them that no such sign would be given, except the sign of Jonah. He explains this more clearly in Matthew 12:40. Just as Jonah was in the belly of the great sea creature for three days, so Jesus would be in the grave for three days, and then he would be seen alive again. If any sign was going to convince them that He was the Christ, the resurrection would. If they did not believe Him then, they were not likely to ever believe!

After leaving them and eventually arriving in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?" The disciples had heard the talk from among the people. They knew that the Scribes and Pharisees doubted His claims of being the Christ. So they said:

Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said unto Him, "blessed are you, Simon Barjonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13-18).

Peter's answer showed that not everyone doubted that Jesus was the Christ. Some were already convinced. The statement of our text was made in answer to this confession.

"I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH..."

This one little statement, when properly understood, destroys many arguments in the denominationally confused religious world of our day!

First, the statement tells us plainly who owns the church. If someone thinks he owns a church, then he also feels that he has the right to run it. He feels he is the final authority in decisions made by the church. Anyone who challenges his authority is dealt with readily and severely. Many preachers have lost their jobs, or have been made so miserable that they had to leave voluntarily, as a result of challenging the authority of one who thought he owned the church. Many members have sat idly by and let some man claim ownership of the church. Perhaps we allow this, thinking that the toleration of a one-man rule is easier than the pain and difficulty necessary to change it for the better. Jesus settled the matter about church ownership in the statement under consideration.

Let us notice conversely who does not own the church.

The preacher does not own the church. The pastor system of many congregations is foreign to the Bible pattern for God's family on earth.

The elders do not own the church. They are the spiritual superintendents of the local body, not the owners.

The largest contributor does not own the church. Once money is given to the church, it is entrusted to the governing body of the church as stewards of God to use it wisely and well. If you do not trust them to do so, do not contribute! Jesus purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28)! This would certainly trump any amount given by any man.

The oldest member or the family with the deepest roots does not own the church.

The people who supplied the materials for the building do not own the church. One man, who could not believe that someone would challenge his authority in the local church, made sure that everyone knew that he supplied the lumber used in the church building. Nonetheless, this did not give him ownership of or power over the Lord's church.

The people with the most ancestors buried in the church cemetery do not own the church.

The largest family with the most faithful or active members does not own the church.

People in other cities and states with ancestral ties to the church do not own the church, and they should have no say in the activities of the local church. Churches hold "homecoming days," when old friends, family, and former members are encouraged to come back and spend the day with us. This is a time to share in fellowship and memories. However, this in no way gives them the authority to dictate policy to the local church!

The church belongs to Jesus. He makes the rules in His word (John 12:48). He directs the activities through the word. He bought it with His blood (Acts 20:28). He is the Son of the Father and the rightful heir (Matthew 2:18). He has the lineage and the clout necessary to own the church (Matthew 16:16). He loves the church and would never do anything to hurt or destroy it. He died for it. The church is not a physical building (Acts 17:24). It is not bricks and mortar. It is not something owned and controlled by people. The church has no earthly headquarters. No one has as much invested in the church as Jesus. No one has the right to claim ownership of the church, except Jesus.

The Lord's church is unique, special, one of a kind among the vastly confusing religions of the world. It is exclusively connected to Jesus. He is the founder, the builder, the husband and the head.

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1-2).

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for

he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:9-10).

No amount of lumber and bricks could establish the Lord's church. It had to be established by the Lord Himself. It had to meet certain criteria before it was the church represented by the candlesticks in the circle in Revelation 1:20. The church must remain faithful to these criteria, or the candlestick will be removed and it becomes just another denomination or a social club (see Rev. 2:5).

Secondly, the statement in our text tells us who is responsible for building the building of living stones that we call the church. Jesus said that He would be the builder, and this fact is substantiated by other inspired writers. Notice the words of the apostle Peter:

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

Hear the words of the Apostle Paul:

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building (1 Cor. 3:9).

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:19-22).

We also know from the scriptures that Jesus is not only the builder of the church, He is the foundation upon which it is built and the cornerstone as well.

For other foundation can no man lay than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20).

The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner (Psalm 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11).

No building or institution can be stronger than the foundation upon which it rests. The strength is directly dependent upon the foundation. The church is no exception. Its strength and stability depend upon its foundation. The scriptural church must have a scriptural foundation (Matt. 16:15-18). Peter boldly proclaimed to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is upon this foundation that the church was built.

The church that is founded upon Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is like the house built upon the rock; nothing will shake it from its foundation. Men have tried to destroy it for hundreds of years, yet it remains. Churches founded upon men are resting upon the sand; the foundations are weak and they will ultimately fall. Christ's church will come through triumphantly, for it is resting on a tried stone, and a sure foundation (Matt. 7:24-27). The church belongs to Jesus; it was built by Jesus. He adds members to it (Acts 2:47). He directs it through His word. He will come again and take the church back to Heaven with Him someday (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:24).

The church that was built by Jesus was built according to the will of God. The church was not built by the will of man. What one man would wish for the church, another may think unnecessary. The church does not operate on man's will, but the

will of God. In Ephesians 1:4-5, we learn that the church was in the mind of God from the beginning.

Jesus did not promise to build thousands of churches, all teaching and believing different doctrines. He promised to build a church: one body of believers able to withstand the gates of Hades. Yet one does not have to look far to see that there are thousands of churches in the world, and most of them are different from the one built by Jesus! God does not put His seal of approval on just anything and everything that is done in the name of religion (Matt. 7:21-23)! There is one true and absolute, unchanging pattern after which God's people must mold themselves to be acceptable to Him.

The church built by Jesus is distinctive. It is different from the confused, denominational landscape established by mankind. It is exclusively connected to Him as the Master builder. This building of living stones is, of course, comprised of people. The word translated "church" is the word "*ecclesia*" meaning, "called out people, an assembly, a crowd, or a mob."

Jesus is connected to His church in a way similar to the connection between a husband and his bride.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For

we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Eph 5:22-33).

The following facts may be gleaned from this familiar passage.

First of all, we learn that Christ is the Head of the church, and the church is to be in submission to Him. Secondly, we see that Jesus gave Himself for the church. Thirdly, we learn that Jesus expects the church to be without spot and blemish, beautiful, pure and as special as a virgin bride. While the primary subject in Ephesians 5:22-33 is the relationship of Christ to the church, the teaching about husbands and wives is a legitimate lesson as well.

With this in mind, we should ever be careful to speak as positively as possible about the church. One would not speak in a negative fashion to others about his own wife. Certainly we should be just as careful not to speak negatively about the Bride of Christ!

We learn that the church is also connected to Jesus in the sense that the head is connected to the body.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another (Rom. 12:4-5).

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ (1 Cor. 12:12).

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23).

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church (Col. 1:24).

The Lord's body is the church, God's called out people. If one loves Christ, one must certainly also love His body!

For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should

have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor. 12:14-27).

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:1-6).

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).

CONCLUSION

In one statement of only five small words, Jesus teaches these great lessons about His church. We learn that the church is His; it belongs to Him. This should tell us that the church should be called by His name and no other. We learn also that Jesus was to build the church, that He is the foundation upon which it is built, and that He is the chief cornerstone, setting the measurement or standard for the rest of the building. We learn that the church of Christ is distinctive from all other churches. It is the only one built by Jesus, upon the fact that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It is the only one about which the promise is made that the gates of Hades would not overcome it! No other church has received such a promise!

Is it not high time that we, as members of the Lord's church, begin telling people about the one church again? Is it no longer true that in order to be the Lord's church one must follow

the Bible pattern in name, organization, plan of salvation, worship, love, benevolence, and by living godly lives?

When did the truth about the church become so out of fashion among people with roots in the restoration movement? There was a time when we felt a sense of urgency in calling the world around us back to plain, simple New Testament Christianity. Now, many who once were of our fellowship are calling the world to come and see the laser light show and to hear the band!

With this one short statement from Jesus, we see the cheap, paper walls of entertainment instead of worship, of noise instead of singing, of fairy tales instead of gospel preaching crumble and fall. And great is the fall thereof! It is the God-given responsibility of every member of the Lord's body to share these truths with the lost and dying world!

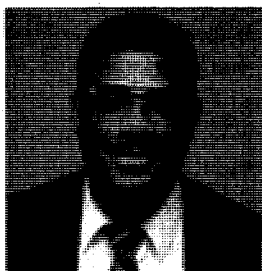
ENDNOTES

1. All quotes are from the NKJV, unless otherwise noted.

THE FISH NET

MATTHEW 13-47-50

CLANCY ETIENNE



Clancy Etienne is a native of the Caribbean. He is a 1979 graduate of the Caribbean Christian College in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and a 1982 graduate of ETSPM. He has been married to the former Anestine Charles for 23 years and they have two sons, Kemuel and Jotham. Brother Etienne has been preaching the gospel since 1977. He has served as minister for congregations of the Lord's Church in the US Virgin Islands and SC. He is presently the minister for the Hartsville Church of Christ in Hartsville, SC.

INTRODUCTION

It is the objective of this lesson to secure a greater awareness of the importance of God's Kingdom and the essentiality of being faithful citizens.

It is fitting to express the admiration I have for saints whose sacrifice and unselfish living demonstrate the importance of God's Kingdom, and as a result have allowed the gospel free course into our present generation. May we also awaken every listener to the awareness that God's wrath with unquenchable fire awaits him who carelessly treats God's glorious Kingdom as some passing fad.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of

the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:47-50)¹

Those who will be saved will be those who welcome, obey, and live in harmony with God's word.² However, in every culture, what is sometimes held up as God's word is not truly God's word. Cultures have ways of fusing traditions of men with the truth of God. While God's people need men who must stand in the gap to effectuate restoration, they must be careful to allow themselves to be driven by their loyalty to Christ in search of the pure unadulterated word of God. To do so, truth seekers must allow an atmosphere in which men are allowed to be free thinkers. The regrettable truth is, that comes with a price – those who are not honest will use freedom to drift away from Christ. Yet still, if the freedom to think is not welcomed and maintained, the price will be much higher because men will not be permitted to go to the plain truth of God's word.

Paul and others of his day took full advantage of the atmosphere which allowed free thinking, a foundation that was established by men like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. They taught that one should think for oneself, think spiritual thoughts, and think logically.³ This effectiveness can be seen in passages like Acts 2:36-38, 17:3, and Philipians 1:17.

To better understand our Scripture text and have a greater appreciation for the lesson(s) it contains, a full awareness of the cultural backdrop in which the Master often addressed His audiences is needed. Because New Testament Christianity (culturally speaking) passed through the conduit of Judaism, many of Jesus' listeners had difficulties arriving at a clear understanding of His teaching. Their preconceived notion that membership in God's Kingdom was automatically inheritable and thus irrevocable, warped their ability to accept the truth and the real freedom it brought (Matt. 3:7-10; 8:5-12; 11:16-24; 12:1-6). Some thought they had a monopoly on what was acceptable to God, and they were unyielding to the One who truly knew it all. Although centuries removed, present-day saints can learn from this

example. We must be very careful that our understanding and acceptance of Bible truth does not become cloudy from the residue of restoration conduits through which truth must pass. While we must always be appreciative for restoration fathers and their progress, we must continue the efforts of leading men closer to the Bible. The restoration plea for New Testament Christianity must be alive and well in every generation.

Another way a keen student can benefit in understanding is to pay close attention to Jesus' points of references and their representations in the parables. Point of references in Bible stories often compel recognition of the greater good intended by the teacher. For example, in the parable of leaven, Jesus is not at all concerned about yeast and dough, but rather the greater that they represent. Thus, the effective agent in leaven points to the effective ability the gospel (Christianity – the practice of kingdom people) has to bring about increase as it affects its surrounding. The one who is about to become a citizen in this Kingdom must therefore receive the Kingdom and all it stands for as something highly valuable. So it is with our story of the fish net. The reader must look beyond the ordinary net and the literal fish to see Jesus' take on the summation of things for those who will become kingdom people. H. Leo Boles makes this observation of the previous parable:

There is a natural historical advancement in the seven parables. The first one, the Sower, the word of God is sown as seed among the different hearers of men; the second, that of the tares, shows the struggle between good and evil to be permanent to the final separation; the third, the grain of mustard seed, shows the small beginning, but final triumph of the kingdom of God; the fourth, parable of the leaven, shows the progress of the kingdom of God, in the heart of the individual and in society; the fifth, hidden treasure, shows the value of the truth, even in its obscured and hidden state; the sixth, merchants seeking goodly pearls, shows the worthiness of the kingdom of God and its truth to be far above any price.⁴

Another indicates what is pictured in the first three parables as valuable in sowing, the fourth in leavening, is here pictured as catching in a net. This catching takes into account the entire work of the gospel.⁵ Jesus wanted his audience to see certain aspects of his Church:

1. Attitudes man may have toward it (3-23);
2. Evil that some times confront it (24-30, 36-43);
3. Its growth (18-19);
4. Its impact on humanity (20-21);
5. Its value (44); and
6. The cruciality of seeking it first (45-46).⁶

The bottom line is kingdom people must always put kingdom matters first.⁷ Jesus, in his earthly ministry, taught that we must keep on seeking God's Kingdom and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33).

THE NECESSITY OF CASTING THE NET

One of the important elements in this story is the necessity of net casting. Fishermen of Jesus' day understood they had to cast the net for fish to get into it. Since the net represents the gospel, we must come to grips with the fact that the hearing and obeying of the gospel is the only means by which the fish – potential kingdom citizens – can be caught. Mere lineage or kinship cannot accomplish the task.⁸

In Romans 10:14, Paul asked, "How shall they believe without hearing?" The answer is not given because it was understood. On another occasion, Paul said the necessity of proclaiming the gospel was placed on him (1 Cor. 9:16). Those who proclaimed the gospel in the first century felt indebted to those who needed to hear it. Not only were they indebted, they were also ready to preach it (Rom. 1:14-15). Telling the good news is not just a need, it is an urgent need because it is the only power (means) God has for the saving of souls (Rom.1:16). We need to feel urgently compelled to preach the gospel of Christ.

Recently, while watching the Today Show on NBC, it was mentioned that the Mormon cult is the number one fastest growing religious movement, and the Catholic church is in second place. This fact further confirms the urgent need for us to get the word of God to those that are lost before it becomes everlastingly too late. Our world of 6.2 billion is truly lost and is galloping its way to a Devil's hell. All of God's fishermen must act now. Today is the day of salvation, not tomorrow (Heb. 3:7-8; 2 Cor. 6:2). The necessity of sharing the saving message requires men and women who love God and the souls of men.

One of the metaphors used in our story, the sea, is a good one. The wide-open sea has always been a good reference for the wide world. Just as the net needs to be cast where the fish are, so it is that the gospel needs to be shared where the unsaved are. The master fisher of men had knowledge of where the lost were and commanded his apprentices to go into all the world (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15). The world is wide, and the souls are many. This is an enormous task, yet God provides instruction for accomplishing this task. Paul taught Timothy that the duplication process was the way to do it. He said, "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). Our watchword, then, is "train." That is, I must help men develop their skills to proclaim God's word.

Training men to go is just one part of the task. If the gospel must reach into the far ends of the world, it is necessary that there are those who are willing to go. One of God's prophets of old serves as a good example for us in this matter. When Isaiah's people were in an undone and miserable state, God needed a savior, and he stepped up to the plate as a volunteer and said, "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8).

In recent years, we have become too familiar with great tragic events like the Titanic, 9/11, and Hurricane Katrina claiming thousands of lives when men just stand by and do nothing. We are told that the SS Californian was anchored just a few miles away but did not hear the first S.O.S. from the Titanic because the radio was turned off. More recently, we witnessed a heartbreaking

situation on the Gulf Coast through the media because a few politicians passed the blame. Men and women are still crying in the chilly waters of the night (metaphorically speaking), their feet are dangling in pits of hell, and you and I cannot stand by. If we cannot go, let us send someone.

What is sad, yet true, is that often we are the last ones to get there. This implies that we are not watching and searching for doors that may be opened. We are watchmen, soldiers, and we must always be on guard. When we are not on guard, when we are not urgent about our task, we send a message of false security. When the lost see we are not eager to save them, they themselves are not eager to become saved. We need to go everywhere and tell everyone (Mark 5:20). Let us remember we are called to be fishers of men, not keepers of the aquarium.

ONLY THOSE WHO REMAIN FAITHFUL WILL BE ETERNALLY SAVED

It is not ironic that the previous parables preceded this one. They emphasize the value, the importance of the Kingdom and its citizenship. The master, having shown the importance of His Kingdom, now shows the consequence for those who take their place lightly in the Kingdom.

How valuable is the Church of Christ? The Church fulfills God; it satisfies Him (Eph.1:22-23). So valuable is the church to God, he paid for it with the very blood of his only Son (Acts 20:28). Therefore, those who are in it must value it by the way they behave in it. Some in the first century were warned of their behavior and of the possible eternal consequences.

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this

matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:19-23).

Simon understood his attitude was not right and the consequence was certain, thus he repented. Another New Testament example is Diotrephes:

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. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John 9-11).

Inspiration does not inform us of Diotrephes's action; however, if he did not repent, he would be a recipient of the casting away mentioned in this parable.

While there are some who pretend to be members in the body, and we cannot be certain who they are, God knows and wants them to be aware that a day of reckoning is coming. A day when all pretenders and those who are slack at their station of service will be made known and will be separated for punishment (Matt. 25:41-46).

Truth is for truth seekers. Through the preaching of the gospel, people of every motive and character enter the Church. Once in the body, change must take place to reflect the believers' perceptive value of the body of Christ (Matt.13:51-52).⁹ However, when that individual refuses to change, he will have his just reward.

Someday Christ's angels will deliberately sort out the righteous from the wicked in the church, with each being placed in his proper reward.¹⁰ Yes, there will come a day of no more fishing – that is when there will be no more time for entering God's Kingdom or to repent if wayward.¹¹ God, being a fair and righteous judge, has reserved this day to judge all men beginning first in his own House.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he hath ordained; [whereof] he hath given assurance unto all [men], in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

Yet if [any man suffer] as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 17 For the time [is come] that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if [it] first [begin] at us, what shall the end [be] of them that obey not the gospel of God? 18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter 4:16-18)

CONCLUSION

Saints and non-saints alike must recognize that the gospel is the only way into God's Kingdom (John 10:7-9; 14:6), and God will judge all including those who enter therein. All must be aware that whoever carelessly and selfishly treats God's Kingdom as some passing fad or insignificant organization, God's wrath awaits him with unquenchable fire.

Are you in the net? Are you in the ship (Church)? Are you continuing faithfully? (Acts 27:31). Let us be thankful to God for his glorious Church, and let us do our level best to live faithfully in it until his Son returns for it.

ENDNOTES

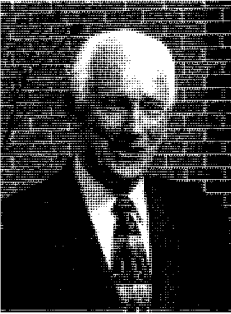
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SECTION IV
NIGHT SPEAKERS

FORGIVENESS

MATTHEW 18:15-35

JAMES MEADOWS



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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important and desirable characteristics of the heart is forgiveness. Three kindred spirits of the heart are giving, thanksgiving, and forgiving. The three really go together. Forgiveness is a greatly misunderstood subject in the brotherhood.

Some hold to the view of conditional forgiveness; that one forgiving one another is dependent upon the person who committed the wrong repenting and/or apologizing. Others hold to the view of unconditional forgiveness; that we should automatically forgive when we are wronged and not wait for repentance and/or an apology!¹

Matthew 18:15-35 gives great details about forgiveness and some of the attitudes of God and man.

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. 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. And 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. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 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. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his

fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.²

The king, in this parable, represents God, and his servants are Christians. The reckoning is typical of God's judgment of us. The ten thousand talents (\$16,000,000) represents our sins against God. The helplessness of the servant to pay the debt pictures our inability to forgive our sins; the king's compassion and mercy represents God's willingness to forgive our sins. The fellow-servant is a brother in Christ. The one hundred pence (\$17.00) represents our sins against one another. The servant taking the debtor by the throat represents our attitude many times toward our brethren. The sorrow of the servants represents the sorrow of saints when they see children of God unwilling to forgive, and God's wrath and punishment pictures God's attitude toward an unforgiving spirit.

In this study, the methodology planned is as follows: (1) What is the meaning of forgiveness? (2) Why must Christians forgive one another? (3) How often should we forgive? (4) How must we forgive one another? (5) What are the responsibilities of the offender? (6) What are the responsibilities of the offended? (7) Some examples of forgiveness. (8) Conclusion.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS?

Forgiveness in its different forms appears one hundred and six times in the Bible. Some of these times refer to God's

forgiveness of sins, and at other times forgiveness refers to our forgiveness of our fellowman.

Webster says to forgive means "1. To cease to feel resentment against an account of wrong committed; stop being angry with, pardon. 2. To give up all claim to exact for (an offense). 3. To cancel or remit (a debt)...to show forgiveness; be inclined to forgive."³

Of two Greek words involving forgiveness, Thayer has this to say, "*Apoluo*: to let go, dismiss...to release a debtor, i.e., not to press one's claim against him, to remit his debt (Matt. 18:27, Lk. 6:37). *Afiemi*: to let go, give up a debt by not demanding it, i.e., to remit, forgive...to give up, keep no longer."

Forgiveness then involves a wrong committed, a debt incurred by that wrong, and the cancellation of that debt. God is the one who can help us deal with all of these.

WHY MUST CHRISTIANS FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER?

First, God commands us to forgive one another. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25). "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13).

Second, Christ has set the example for us. Christ has never asked us to do anything He has never done before us – the lone exception being repentance. While hanging on the cross Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Some people think that God forgave them at this point, but, if so, then he forgave them while they were engaged in the very act for which the Lord was asking God to forgive them. Fifty-three days later, many of these same heard Peter accuse them of crucifying and slaying the Son of God.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the

apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 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 (Acts 2:37-38).

Three thousand souls who "gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). It was at this point that God answered the Lord's prayer on the cross.

Third, we must forgive because we ourselves have been forgiven. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

When God's forgiveness of our personal sin against Him is really understood, then such creates in us the godly desire to forgive others. No matter how many facts of Scripture we know or verses we may have memorized, a harsh, vindictive spirit is a sure sign that we do not truly know what it means to be forgiven by our God through Christ.⁴

Fourth, we must forgive in order that we may receive forgiveness from the Father. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

This verse does not belong to the prayer; it is added by Jesus to show why the petition for forgiveness of sins must be conditional. The one who cannot forgive others or will not forgive others puts himself where he cannot ask God to forgive him. ...It does not mean that our forgiving others merits God's forgiving us. It does make a forgiving spirit the condition of our receiving forgiveness from God.⁵