



**FORE**  
**IN MY**  
**BONES**

**Volume 3**

FROM THE GREAT COMMISSION TO REVELATION AND BEYOND  
For Mission and Soul-saving Workshops, Devotionals, and Classes.

**Glover Shipp**



# Fire in My Bones

Volume III

From the Great Commission to Revelation  
and Beyond

By

Glover Shipp

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*“But if I say,  
‘I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,’  
His word is in my heart like a burning fire,  
shut up in my bones.  
I am weary of holding it in;  
indeed, I cannot”  
(Jeremiah 20:9 NIV).*

# Acknowledgements

I am indebted, as always, to the late J.C. Choate, for first launching me into book publishing, and for printing all of my missions-oriented books. I am especially grateful to his widow, Betty Burton Choate, for carrying on his noble tradition. Even under financial and personal stress, she agreed to publish this book, as well..

**Note:** All Bible references are from the New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise indicated. Used by permission.

# Dedication

Dedicated to all of those pioneers down through the centuries in whose bones burned an unquenchable fire to share their faith with nations that did not know Jesus.

# Publisher's Statement

It was a number of years ago that brother Glover Shipp first approached J.C. about printing Volume One of a three-part study, tracing God's fire of evangelism through the entire Old and New Testaments. Since we shared Glover's zeal for mission efforts around the world, J.C. was happy to make the promise to print the books for him. Volumes One and Two have been available for some time now, covering the Old Testament period, and tracing God's work to reach out to humanity. While our co-worker, Eulene Ramsey, was typing the second manuscript, she remarked several times that it made her want to "just get up and go...!" We felt that no higher recommendation could have been made for the book: in her heart, as she typed, it was doing its intended work.

Volume Three of **Fire in My Bones** begins with the birth of the church of Christ in Jerusalem and continues through Revelation, paralleling the experiences and challenges of the Christians of the first century with those of Christians of today. They were given a great commission, and that commission has come down to us. They were promised that their Lord would be with them as they went "into all the world". We have the same promise. Rest from their labors, in the presence of God, was to be their reward; ours in the same — provided we *work in obedience*. We pray that these comprehensive books, and Volume Three in particular, will inspire every reader to work with greater dedication and zeal toward fulfilling our Lord's command for His people.

Betty (J.C.) Choate  
Winona, MS  
February 6, 2009



# Introduction:

I had a dream ... a dream of tracing the mission message of the Bible, Genesis to Revelation. While serving as a missionary in Brazil, that dream was realized in part in 1978, when J.C. Choate, the brother who, more than any other, encouraged me to begin writing books, published **Fire in my Bones, Volume I**.

But there was so much more to the story. Volume I ended with Jeremiah. What should I do with the remainder of the Sacred Story? Well, I continued researching and writing, finally completing Volume II, beginning with a Psalm, including passages from Isaiah and Jeremiah, continuing through Malachi and on into the Gospel accounts, ending with the Great Commission. This volume was published in 2004.

Fortunately, the great Redemption Story doesn't end with the Great Commission, Christ's marching orders. It is carried out in a dramatic way in the Book of Acts and the remainder of the New Testament, ending triumphantly in Revelation. Correction — It still doesn't end with Revelation, but continues down through the ages to today and tomorrow, if God gives us tomorrow.

So I felt compelled to continue reporting the story in Volume III. The message in it the same as in the other two books. It is a message that has never ceased to burn in the very bones of some who have been moved to carry it to other peoples. May this final volume in the Fire Trilogy be a blessing to all who read it and heed its messages.



# Fire in My Bones

Volume III

From the Great Commission to Revelation  
and Beyond

By

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# Contents

1. Marching Orders .....	1
2. First-Fruits of a Heavenly Harvest .....	3
3. Salvation in No One But Jesus .....	5
4. Whom Shall We Obey, God or Men? .....	8
5. The Kingdom Reaches Samaria and Ethiopia .....	10
6. From Enforcer to Evangelist.....	14
7. Scandalous! Eating with a Gentile .....	17
8. Antioch, Hub for Mission Outreach .....	20
9. Saul and Barnabas Chosen for Mission.....	23
10. Resisted and Persecuted in Asia Minor .....	26
11. Jews First and Then Christians? .....	29
12. Paul Has a Dream .....	32
13. Life in a Philippian Jail.....	35
14. Two Jewish Communities: One Closed, the Other Opened ..	38
15. Paul Gives a Lesson on Christian Evidences .....	41
16. Tent-Making and Soul-Saving in Corinth .....	44
17. A Big Bonfire and a Noisy Riot.....	46
18. Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders .....	50
19. Paul's Conversion Story Retold .....	54
20. Turn Them from Darkness to Light .....	57
21. The Gentiles Will Listen.....	60
22. Not Ashamed of the Gospel .....	63
23. While We Were Still Sinners .....	66
24. God's Greatest of All Gifts.....	69
25. Sons of the Living God.....	72
26. How Can They Hear Without a Preacher.....	74
27. Keep the Flame Alive.....	77
28. Every Tongue Will Confess to God .....	79
29. God's Ambassadors .....	82
30. No Other Gospel .....	84
31. A Basket Full of Blessings .....	87

32. Unlocking the Mystery of Christ.....90  
33. Shining Like Stars in the Universe.....92  
34. Mainspring of the Universe Proclaimed.....95  
35. The Message Rang Out from You! .....98  
36. In Season and Out of Season.....101  
37. Declare His Praises.....104  
38. He Who Has the Son Has Life .....107  
39. I Have Set Before You an Open Door.....109  
40. Purchased of God.....112  
41. Suffering and Overcoming All for Christ.....114  
42. All Nations Will Worship God.....117  
43. Do You Have a Wedding Invitation? .....120  
44. Unending Water for the Thirsty .....123  
45. The Spirit and the Bride Say, “Come!” .....125  
46. Does the Fire Still Burn in Our Bones?.....127

## Chapter 1

# Marching Orders

Luke 24:36-50, Acts 1:6-11

Defeat had suddenly turned into victory! The little band of apostles had heard from some of their number that their Master was not really dead. He had risen and there were witnesses to the fact. They could hardly believe their ears, despite all that He had said about being executed and brought back to life.

But now He appeared in their midst. They were still frightened and filled with doubt. After all, in the normal course of things people don't come out of their graves alive. Yet here He was, and He told his incredulous followers: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

They still doubted, however, so He asked them for some food. He ate it in their presence, and then reminded them: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. ... This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead the third day... "

## What Were the Apostles to Do?

Now what? What would their Lord do and what would they do in these new and exciting circumstances? He soon cleared up the matter of their part in His plan: "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations and peoples, beginning in Jerusalem, the very city that crucified me. You will be my voice, acting as my proclaimers. Your message will cut the hearts of your hearers with a message of repentance, but then will offer them forgiveness in their Savior."

This would prove to be a stirring task, but also a dangerous one. Those who hated their Lord and His message would attempt to destroy the messengers, as always seems to happen.

## And What Would Jesus Do?

And what would Jesus do in the meantime? Establish an earthly

kingdom, ruling in Jerusalem and driving out the hated Romans? This is what many longed for and still do even today — a millennial kingdom, with Christ ruling over all nations. But Jesus didn't sit down on an earthly throne. Instead, He rose into the clouds to Heaven, where He sat down on His glorious throne at the side of His Father (Colossians 3:1). He had already announced that His Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), but those whose heart was set on a political kingdom refused to hear Him.

Then two angels appeared as the apostles stood open-mouthed, watching their Lord disappear. The angels asked them: “Why do you stand here looking at the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will return in the same way you have seen him go” (Acts 1:11).

## His Work Left in Human Hands

He is coming back. He is coming back, praise the Lord! The apostles were witnesses of all this. They had seen Him betrayed. Some had seen Him die. All had seen Him alive. Now He would leave His work on earth in their hands, a task of worldwide dimensions. To make certain that they would have the strength to do this and the ability to recall His teaching, He would send them His Holy Spirit to dwell in and guide them (John 14:25). All they needed was a signal from Heaven that they were to begin their proclamation.



## Chapter 2

# First-fruits of a Heavenly Harvest

### Acts 2:1-41

Pentecost, celebrating the first fruits of the harvest, was one of the required annual religious feast days for all Jewish people, the others being the Passover, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. Many of those who had come from all over the world on that day for the Passover stayed over another 50 days to also celebrate Pentecost.

So, on this Pentecost, Jews were present from 15 different language groups — people of Rome, Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Crete, Arabia and the Jewish homeland. The Temple courtyard was a veritable babel of tongues. All were there to celebrate another harvest season, the sign of Yahweh's continued blessing of the land.

The crowd filled the great Herodian temple courtyard. It joyfully milled around, soaking up the grandeur of the temple and participating in the many first-fruits sacrifices being raised to the Lord, Provider of all things. The ever-present hawkers were in their stalls, selling “authentic” baskets of first-fruits to pilgrims from afar, and exchanging foreign currency into sacred temple shekels, for a markup, of course.

### A Roaring Wind and a Mysterious Flame

Then suddenly a roar, as of a strong wind, filled the courtyard, stilling the babble. All eyes turned toward a cluster of men standing in a colonnaded corner. Upon each of their heads appeared a flame. Then, miraculously, they began to speak, each in the language of some group of foreigners. The messengers were surprised, but just imagine the surprise on the part of Parthians and Phrygians who heard them speaking in their tongue! Thousands came running to see and hear this phenomenon.

“What is happening?” they wondered. “These men are obviously

unlettered Galileans, yet they are speaking our language perfectly!”

“Oh, they are just drunk!” some who heard them ridiculed.

## Peter’s Powerful Sermon

Peter, that same Peter who days before had denied even knowing Jesus, now took the stage. Speaking up loudly, he told the gaping crowd:

“These men are not drunk, as some of you suppose. It is only 9 in the morning. What is happening was prophesied long ago by the prophet Joel. He said that Adonai would pour out His Spirit on His servants. He also announced that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. This prophecy is being fulfilled right before your eyes.

“Now listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was accredited by God through miracles, wonders and signs performed by Him. Many of you know this. But He was handed over to you, and you, with the help of wicked men, crucified Him. But God raised Him from the dead, just as our father David said about Him. God revealed to him that one of his descendants would reign on his throne.

“This man, Jesus, was not abandoned to the grave. God has raised Him to life, and we are all witnesses to that fact. Now let all Israel know that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

## The Terms of Forgiveness

The crowd, deadly silent, was cut to the heart and cried out: “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter told them: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Peter pled with them to save themselves from their corrupt generation. Many in the crowd surged forward, accepting his message. On this same day about 3,000 people were baptized and added to their number.

Pentecost is the celebration of first-fruits. What an abundant first-fruit of the Lord’s harvest was gathered on this Pentecost! From an initial 12 to 120 to 500 and then 3,000 more souls were brought to the Lord’s house. Praise Him for this, the birthday of His church and the thousands celebrating it.

## Chapter 3

# Salvation in No One But Jesus

## Acts 4:1-20

Peter and John had worked an eye-popping miracle, healing a beggar crippled from birth. Humans, always curious, flocked to the scene. Peter, always one to speak up, explained to the crowd that it wasn't by their power that the man was healed, but by Jesus. He didn't mince any words, telling those gathered there that God had glorified His servant Jesus. Yet, "You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."

He went on to tell the crowd that they had done this terrible travesty of justice out of ignorance. But this was precisely how God had fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Christ and His suffering. "Repent, then, and turn to God," Peter declared, "so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...."

### Does This Sermon Ignore Baptism?

This passage is used as an excuse by some for excluding baptism as a requirement for salvation from sins. It emphasizes repentance — which those standing there sorely needed — and turning to God. What is involved in turning to God? Obedience to all of His requirements! Peter had commanded in Acts 2:38 that those present repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. "For" in the Greek is *eis*, its normal meaning being "in the direction of." Modern-day Spanish and Portuguese translations of this verse accurately reflect the original meaning, while the English word "for" has multiple meanings, so does not reflect the Greek as clearly. Other passages mention the requirements of faith and public confession of that faith. We cannot pick and choose which we will obey and which we will teach. Later on, in Acts 20:27, Paul said that he had not failed to declare "the whole counsel" of God. This "whole counsel" obviously included the entire process involved in our new birth into Christ.

## Jesus, Moses' Prophetic Successor

Peter affirmed that it was precisely about Jesus that Moses had prophesied — God would raise up a prophet like Moses, who warned that everyone must listen to this prophet. Anyone who didn't would be completely cut off from his people. Various figures in the past 2000 years, such as Muhammad and Joseph Smith, have declared themselves to be Moses' successor, but only Jesus actually filled this role. In fact, all of the prophets foretold the coming of Christ and His days. His hearers, heirs of the promises made to Abraham long before, were the first to hear about the blessing Christ offered to those who turned from their wicked ways.

Well, the guardians of orthodoxy were soon on the scene. They were dismayed by the teaching going on about Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. The temple guards hauled off the two apostles to prison. They may have been behind bars, but the influence of their teaching, and that of the other apostles, continued. The infant church multiplied. Already there were some 5,000 men alone in the faith. This was enough to highly disturb the religious authorities. The situation was getting out of hand.

## The Christian Message a Threat

Nothing has changed. Whenever the true message of Christ is preached and heeded in many cultures, it poses a threat to them. The church is still persecuted. Preachers are still executed. This happened recently in Turkey, North Korea, China and principalities of southern Arabia, to name just a few places. Jesus told us that in this world we would suffer tribulation. Satan does not want the church to succeed, so he uses his big guns and big leaders to attempt to crush it, but to no avail. Tertullian said in his **Apologeticus I**: “The blood of Christians is the seed [of the Church].” John Mansfield wrote, “I look on martyrs as mistakes. But still they burned for it at stakes.”

The next day all of the big figures of the theocracy had the two apostles brought before them, asking them by what power or authority they had done this miracle. Peter — this same Peter who, only weeks earlier had timidly denied Christ — now filled with the Spirit, answered: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

## Salvation only in Jesus

Could this be any plainer? Salvation is only in Jesus. The Muslim is not saved. The Hindu or Buddhist is not saved. Only those who believe in Christ and obey Him in baptism and then grow into a faithful Christian life can be saved. This is not politically correct, but it is absolutely true. Why must there be a fire in our bones to tell the world about Jesus? Because only in Him does the world have a chance to save itself from itself.

After much debate over what to do with these two men, the leaders feared to punish them, because the people knew that the two had worked an amazing miracle. So they ordered Peter and John to stop preaching Christ. Their answer? Not “Yes, Sir,” but rather: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

## Speak They Did and Speak We Must

Speak they did and speak we must, if we are to be true to our Lord’s marching orders. Bruce Barton wrote, “Jesus picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world” (Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows*). How well are we doing in being true to our Lord’s calling?

## Chapter 4

# Whom Shall We Obey, God or Men?

Acts 5:12-42

Threats were to no avail. The apostles, who shortly before were hiding in fear, were now preaching boldly about Jesus, His death, burial and resurrection. They were preaching about repentance, baptism and the remission of sins.

What had made the difference in a few short days? They had seen the risen Christ. In fact, they and 500 other disciples had also seen Him (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). It doesn't matter how many bones are dug up by archeologists and announced to be those of Jesus. These men knew they had seen their Lord alive again and had watched Him return to Heaven.

They had also received power from God to recall what Jesus had taught them and to transmit it in a dynamic way. They could not help but speak the things they had seen and heard.

### Preaching in the Face of Breaking the Law

So here they were, all twelve of them, fearlessly preaching and teaching in public. Officialdom couldn't tolerate this, so it had the entire group rounded up. The apostles were soon behind bars, but no prison could hold them for long. They had powerful help from the Lord, who laughs at human attempts to thwart His purposes. Today, some are attempting to silence God in all of the public arena. This is foolish, because no person can silence Him or His messengers. So the twelve were soon back telling others about their great Shepherd and High Priest. They were to tell the people the full message of life in Christ. We have the same mandate today — make the message complete and clear.

The high priest and his associates called together the assembly of grey beards to once-for-all handle this new “sect” and its spokesmen. However, imagine their surprise when it was reported to them that the jail was locked down, but no prisoners were there! Then, someone rushed in and reported: “Look! Those prisoners are back in the temple courtyard teaching.”

So the captain of the guard called out his officers and hurried to the temple. There they gingerly arrested the 12. They didn't want to wrestle them to the ground for fear of the crowd that had gathered. They wanted no stones being thrown their way.

When the apostles stood again before the richly-robed Jewish senate, the high priest charged them: "We gave you strict orders not to teach anymore in this name, yet you have filled the city with your teaching. You are determined, are you not, to put the blame on us for this man's blood?"

## Guilty of Jesus' Blood, or Not?

Interesting! Before Jesus' death, the whole crowd had willingly accepted responsibility for killing Him. All present at the trial told Roman Governor Pilate that the blood of this accused man could fall on them and their children (Matthew 7:24-25). Now, the leaders accused the apostles of trying to make them guilty of Jesus' blood. This was a frantic effort to transfer guilt, but to no avail. The prosecutors had become the defendants.

The apostles answered this subterfuge:

"We must obey God rather than men! You killed Jesus, but the God of our fathers raised Him from the dead. He is now at God's right hand as Prince and Savior. Why raised? That he might grant repentance and forgiveness to Israel. Both we and the Holy Spirit are witnesses of all this."

## Pushing the Hot Buttons

The messengers pushed all the hot buttons. The leaders were beside themselves with fury. Only the wise counsel of Gamaliel, a respected teacher of the law, saved the apostles from death. They escaped martyrdom, but not punishment. They were beaten and again warned not to speak more in the name of Jesus.

Did they listen? Of course not! They rejoiced that they had suffered disgrace for the name of Jesus, and they continued to teach day after day, at the temple and from house to house, that Jesus is the Christ.

O that we today might demonstrate this same zeal! We must obey God, no matter the cost. We must fill our city, country and world with the only message that brings hope.

## Chapter 5

# The Kingdom Reaches Samaria and Ethiopia

## Acts 8

Sometimes it takes a trauma to get us out of our rut. It may be an accident, illness, death, loss of a job, family breakup, home destroyed by fire or flood.... Whatever the cause, such events may set us on a new course, with new purposes and values. I well remember having polio in 1954. That dangerous and prolonged illness led our family from Dallas to California and a new life of preaching, teaching, working as a graphic artist and finally, serving at Pepperdine College as director of public relations and publications. Another crisis, my approaching 40 years of age, uprooted us from southern California and sent us to Brazil for 18 years in missionary service. All of us can recall such critical turns in our lives. How we handled them shaped our entire future.

### A Moment of Truth

The early church, too, had its moment of truth. It had already felt the harsh sting of persecution aimed at the apostles and even witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen. Then, in Acts 8, the young firebrand, Saul of Tarsus, launched a campaign of hate against the disciples, seeing to their imprisonment and often their death.

As a result, many Christians were scattered to other locations. They had been a close-knit family in Jerusalem, but this was not the end of the Lord's plan for His church. It was His purpose for it to be a worldwide spiritual kingdom, drawing all peoples into its embrace. It took persecution to get it moving outward.

### New Outposts of the Kingdom

The text tells us that those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Gospel. Soon there were outposts of the kingdom in other locations. One of these was Samaria, the capital of the despised Samaritans. When the Assyrians had conquered the kingdom of Israel, their ruler took into exile most of the inhabitants, replacing them with a



mixture of foreigners whom he had already displaced. When the newcomers got into trouble, Assyria sent them a Jewish priest. The result eventually was a hybrid religion that accepted only the first five books of the Hebrew text and worshipped God on Mt. Gerizim. Devout Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans, traveling between Judea and Galilee by way of the Jordan River foothills. Jesus, however, who saw in all humans value and the need for salvation, journeyed directly through Samaria and taught a Samaritan woman in Sychar.

He explained to her that people would one day worship God neither in Jerusalem nor on Mt. Gerizim, both geographical locations, but rather, in a spiritual location — in the heart. They would worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:1-42).

Philip, one of the seven Grecian Jews appointed in Acts 6 to care for the needs of Grecian widows, left Jerusalem during the persecution and went north to Samaria to evangelize there. It may have been much easier for him to do, as a Jew who had been accustomed to living among Gentiles, than for the apostles, who still clung to the practice of preaching only to Jews. You see, Philip had a broader vision than they, because of his background out in the world of that day.

In Samaria, crowds gathered to hear his proclamation of Christ and to observe his power to heal and drive out evil spirits. They were overjoyed by what they heard and saw. Here was a Jew giving them new hope in the Messiah, whom they also had expected. Many responded by being baptized. Among them was Simon the Sorcerer, or worker of occult arts. He followed Philip around and was astounded by the genuine miraculous acts of the preacher, in contrast to his “magic.”

Before long, word got to Jerusalem that glorious things were happening in Samaria, so Peter and John were dispatched there to check out the situation. None of the new Christians there had received the Holy Spirit, so the two apostles imparted this gift to them by prayer and laying their hands upon them.

## Simon Enters the Scene

When Simon saw how the miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit were transmitted, he offered the apostles money for these powers. He could just see how lucrative his life could be with these genuine miraculous

signs at his disposal. Peter thoroughly denounced him, however, for his request. We don't know if he genuinely repented, but he did at least ask the apostles to pray for him. For all practical purposes, he dropped out of the biblical story after that episode. However, he left a new word that made it all the way into our vocabulary — simony, which means purchasing a spiritual or church office.

Peter and John then returned to Jerusalem, but on the way preached in many Samaritan villages. Their trip north had expanded their spiritual horizon to include the Samaritan people.

## Philip Takes a Journey

Philip was enjoying a successful ministry in Samaria, but the Lord had other plans for him. An angel instructed him to head south to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, a city enroute to Egypt that had been a Philistine stronghold. Philip had no clue, apparently, as to why he was being sent down that road, but to his credit, he obeyed without question. It was a lonely and somewhat barren track.

Then he saw a chariot going south, away from Jerusalem. The official riding in it was treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This was probably Nubia or Cush, and not modern Ethiopia. This high official was a eunuch and, as such, was not permitted to enter the interior courts of the temple. Nevertheless, he had traveled some 1,200 to 1,500 miles in a horse-drawn chariot to worship God — a round trip requiring months. How had he learned of God? Was he a Jew? No one knows, but we do know that he was a devout believer, so much so that he was reading a scroll of Isaiah as he bumped along the road.

The Spirit ordered Philip to meet this man. Philip's question about whether or not the eunuch understood what he was reading from Isaiah 53 opened the way for him to join the eunuch in the chariot. How we approach contacts with Christ's Word is all-important. Philip showed wisdom in his approach. He began teaching about Jesus from the very section of Isaiah that prophesied about the suffering Messiah.

Obviously, the eunuch learned more than just about the life of Jesus. He learned about teachings of Jesus, His death and resurrection, and the manner in which sins could be washed away by the blood of the sacrificed Savior. We know Philip taught the eunuch about baptism, because the

official, seeing a pond of water, asked, “See, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

This man, who heretofore could not approach the Lord, now could do so. He readily accepted baptism. When the two came up out of the water, Philip was perhaps miraculously taken away by the Spirit. His task there was finished. It was up to the eunuch to grow in the faith and share it with others in his country. Meanwhile, Philip went northward, preaching everywhere until he arrived in Caesarea, a strategic seaport and provincial capital in the northwest of Israel.

Here, we can see clearly God’s hand at work, expanding the outreach of the Gospel message, first to “second-class” Samaritans and then to a sexually-mutilated foreigner. In both cases, only a shakeup of the status quo caused a disciple of Christ to reach beyond his own comfort zone to take the message to other lands and peoples.

## Still Under the Same Marching Orders

Nothing has changed, folks. We are still under the marching orders that moved Philip.

It is not comfortable out there. I know from experience, having spent many years in and out of other nations. As I write this, a North Korean preacher has been executed for distributing Bibles. In October, 2004, Abdel Joussef was martyred in Bahrain for preaching Christ and distributing Bibles. Then, in April, 2005, Muhammed Mula was executed for building a World English Institute in Bahrain. Three other Christians were martyred in that region in the same month. A brother in Uganda has just gotten out of prison after a “fine” of \$300 for a crime he didn’t commit. A young missionary in that same country died recently in a highway accident. A missionary apprentice in Brazil died in the surf, saving two girls who were drowning. In 1317 missionary Ramón Lull was stoned to death by Muslims for preaching to them. In the 1600s Felix Manz was executed by drowning for teaching immersion.

And so it has always gone. The road may be rough and steep to find our Lord’s lost sheep. But go we must to find them, just as Philip went.

## Chapter 6

# From Enforcer to Evangelist

Acts 9:1-30; 22:1-16; 26:9-18

The name Saul of Tarsus would not have appeared on anyone's list of possible contacts for conversion. Born of a devout Jewish family in the Roman free-city of Tarsus, in Cilicia, he was sent to Jerusalem to study under the most revered Pharisaic scholar of his day, Gamaliel. There he outshone his contemporaries and became the poster boy for that sect. He was not only devout, but was fanatically dedicated to the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law.

### Christianity Seen As a Heresy

When young Saul witnessed the dramatic rise of the Christian Way in Jerusalem and then outward to other cities, he saw in it heresy and a major threat to the Jewish faith. So he turned enforcer, determined to rip out this new "sect" by the roots. With a team of colleagues, he rounded up all of the disciples he could and saw to their punishment, even death. Exhausting his list in Jerusalem and its region, he was still breathing out murderous threats against the disciples, so he went to the high priest requesting written authorization to stamp out the spreading "cancer" of the Christian Way in Damascus.

Soon he and a gang of associates were on the road to Damascus, the ancient capital of Syria, several days' journey to the north. As he approached his destination, he had the shock of his life. The brightest light he had ever seen flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. What was happening? There were no lightning flashes, yet this penetrating light seemed to go right through him. Then a voice spoke to him from Heaven.

### The Blinding Revelation

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad."

This goad was a sharply-pointed stick used to prod reluctant oxen into doing their job. Kicking against the goad merely created more pain for the animals. Just because they kicked out did not result in the goad's

being taken away. So, Saul was bringing trouble upon himself and could not win. Bewildered and blinded by the intense glare, he asked, “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting,” the vibrant voice answered. “Now get up and go into the city and you will be instructed on what to do.”

Jesus of Nazareth! The very person behind the growth of the Way — the promised Messiah, the Hope of Israel, the Redeemer of mankind, the Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world — this was the Divine Being Saul had been persecuting. How his house caved in around him! How he trembled, as he was led blind into Damascus! For three days he must have wept, repented and prayed, neither eating nor drinking.

## God’s Timing at Work

Finally, in God’s timing, He sent a Christian leader, Ananias, to Saul. Ananias was a reluctant witness, objecting that this Saul was an agent of doom against those calling on the Lord’s name. Yet, here Ananias was being sent to him to restore his sight.

“Go!” said the Lord. “This Saul is my chosen instrument to share my message with the Gentiles, their rulers and my people Israel. Just as he caused many to suffer, he will suffer much for my name.”

So, reluctant Ananias went to Saul, restoring his eyesight and, after teaching him, asked, “And now, why do you tarry? Arise and be baptized, washing away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Once in Brazil, I met with a young college student who had taken all of our six Bible correspondence courses with high marks. Now I was in her home, a thousand miles from my home, reviewing with her what she had studied. Finally I asked her, “Angelica, why do you tarry? Arise and be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord.” I will never forget her answer: “I’ve just been waiting for you to ask.”

So at 11 that night, I had the honor of baptizing her in a quiet moon-illuminated ocean lagoon, the first fruits of a harvest that now in that city numbers hundreds of faithful Christians.

## The Enforcer Turned Preacher

So it was with Saul. He was baptized, received the Holy Spirit, was

able to see again, more clearly than ever before, and he immediately began to preach the very Christ he had so long denounced as a fraud. He became both a sensation and a danger in the local synagogues in Damascus. His fellow Jews never forgave him for being a “turncoat.” They hounded him the rest of his life. On this occasion they plotted his death, so he was lowered during the night from the city wall and made his escape.

Perhaps no one better portrays a man on fire for his Lord than Saul, who later became known as the Apostle Paul. Perhaps no one among the apostles had such a long-lasting impact on the future of the Faith, launching the Lord’s church on Cyprus, throughout Asia Minor, in Macedonia and Achaia, and in Ephesus, along with perhaps other locations. He also wrote 12 or 13 of the 26 New Testament books, half of the total.

“Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel,” he wrote (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Paul was a chosen instrument of the Lord, and O how He played that instrument, to the blessing of countless people! He was one of the first and the most far-ranging messenger of his day to the Gentiles. Much of the time he supported himself while he tirelessly taught others. Even in prison for his faith, he poured out his heart to churches he had initiated and associates who carried on the work in many locations.

## Chapter 7

# Scandalous! Eating with a Gentile

Acts 10:1-11:18

Caesarea was a major seaport on the northern coast of Israel. Built by Herod the Great and named in honor of Caesar Augustus, it had the best harbor in that region and was a Roman administrative center. Troops stationed there could quickly be dispersed to handle any emergency.

Cornelius was a centurion headquartered in Caesarea. A centurion was commander of 100 soldiers and often a detachment of cavalry, as well. He was highly unusual in that he had come to believe in God, but without taking on Jewish rites and rituals. He was therefore called a devout believer. Both he and his family prayed regularly and gave generously to those in need.

### Catching God's Eye

Cornelius caught God's eye. One afternoon Cornelius had a vision in which an angel appeared to him, saying, "Cornelius!" Startled almost out of his boots, he asked, "What is it, Lord?"

The angel answered, "What you have done for the poor and your continuous prayers have gone to the presence of God as a memorial offering. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon Peter. They will find him in the house of Simon the leatherworker."

Cornelius wasted no time. He called two of his servants and a devout soldier. He told them what had happened and sent them to Joppa to locate Peter.

### Peter's Vision on a Rooftop

Meanwhile, what was going on with Peter? At noon the next day, as the messengers approached, Peter went up onto the flat roof of the house to pray while the meal was being prepared downstairs. He fell into a trance and saw a large sheet let down from Heaven. It was filled with all

kinds of animals, reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” “Why, I can’t do that, Lord!” the shocked Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything unclean or that is not kosher according to our law.” The voice said, “Do not call anything unclean that God has made clean.”

This scenario was repeated three times, and then the sheet returned to Heaven. Peter was perplexed about the meaning of this vision. It went contrary to all he had ever been taught. Just then, the three men from Caesarea arrived and asked if Peter was staying there.

The Spirit entered the scene and told Peter, “Three men are downstairs looking for you. Do not hesitate. Go with them, because I have sent them.” Peter went down and asked the men why they had come. They answered, “Cornelius, a devout man respected by the Jewish people, was instructed by an angel to send for you, so that he could hear what you have to say.”

Peter then invited them in to be his guests. Here was another thing that Jews normally never did. These were Gentiles, considered unclean by all good Jews. Yet they became Peter’s house guests.

## Fateful Trip to Caesarea

The next day Peter set out with them, taking along some fellow believers from Joppa. The following day they arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called in his relatives and close friends. When Peter walked in, Cornelius bowed before him. Peter told him, “Get up. I am only a man.”

When Peter saw the crowd in Cornelius’ house, he said, “You know that it is against Jewish law to associate with a Gentile. But God has told me that I should not call any person unclean.”

This was a huge revelation to Peter, who had grasped the spiritual significance of the vision he had experienced. Then he asked, “Why have you sent for me?”

Cornelius repeated his vision to Peter and added, “It was good of you to come. We are here in God’s presence to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.”

Peter explained, “I now see that God does not show favoritism, but accepts those of every nation who fear Him and do right.” Ah, the reve-



lation continued. Provincial Peter grew by leaps and bounds as his world suddenly expanded from his fellow Jews to all peoples.

Peter then related the story of Jesus, including His death, burial and resurrection. He added that the apostles were witnesses to all of this, and had been commissioned to preach Christ as living Savior and Judge of the living and dead.

Even as he spoke, the Holy Spirit descended on all who heard his message. The Jewish believers present were astonished that Gentiles had received the Spirit and were speaking in other languages and praising God.

## Gentiles Brought into the Kingdom

Then Peter asked, “Can anyone forbid these people from being baptized in water?” No one dared raise an objection in the face of all they had seen, so Peter ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus.

What rejoicing Cornelius and his associates must have felt! Now they were no longer excluded from the blessing of direct fellowship with the Lord. Now they were saved and were members of Christ’s family.

## Overcoming Unfair Criticism

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the Jewish believers criticized him for, of all things, eating with uncircumcised men. He related to them all that had happened and how the Holy Spirit had descended on Peter’s listeners, just as He had done at Pentecost with the apostles.

When they heard this, the Jewish Christian leaders had no further objections. They concluded, “So God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.” How slow they had been to learn this and how soon they lapsed again into a Jew vs. Gentile standoff.

I praise God that He has granted me, an unworthy Gentile, the same salvation and hope that the apostles and early Jewish Christians had. And I pray that this salvation may be received by all peoples — Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Communists, Animists, Atheists and all others who do not yet know Christ.

## Chapter 8

# Antioch, Hub for Mission Outreach

### Acts 11:19-30

The Lord seems to choose strategically-located larger cities as centers for expansion of the Kingdom. First it was Jerusalem, then Antioch of Syria, then Philippi and Thessalonica, then Corinth, Ephesus and Rome. In Acts 19:10 it was noted that all in the province of Asia heard the Word carried to them from Ephesus. In Revelation 2 and 3 is a list of seven churches of Asia, not including Colossae and perhaps others launched through the efforts of Christians in Ephesus. In today's world it is cities such as Singapore, where teams go out to initiate and build up the work in Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia and even China. It is in centers such as São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Recife, Brazil, from which the message has reached dozens of other Brazilian cities. The same can be said for other key metropolitan centers in the world.

This is the way it should be. Theoretically, at least, churches in major urban locations have the resources and manpower to extend their spiritual influence to other locations. If they do not multiply their influence in other cities and countries, it may be due to their myopic vision.

### Antioch of Syria a Hub for Outreach

Antioch of Syria early on became a center for evangelism. It was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire and the seat of Roman rule over the province of Syria. Renowned for its culture and learning, it had a large Jewish colony. After the death of Stephen in Acts 7, persecuted disciples fled all the way to Antioch, 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

In this way began one of the largest and most active of the churches in New Testament times. Those who arrived there from Cyprus began teaching Gentiles, as well as Jews. According to Luke in Acts 11, the Lord blessed their efforts and a great number of people turned to the Lord.

When news of this amazing growth in Antioch reached Jerusalem, church leaders there sent Barnabas, first mentioned in Acts 4 as a generous Christian from Cyprus, to Antioch. Acts 11:24 notes that he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, who encouraged the infant church to remain true to the Lord. Due in part to his presence, great numbers of people became Christians.

## Enter Saul of Tarsus

The field in Antioch was ripe, but there were not enough seasoned workers, so Barnabas went to Tarsus, Saul's hometown, to recruit him for the work there. For an entire year the two taught countless people. It was at Antioch that believers were first called *Christians* — followers of Christ who displayed His attributes of grace, love, forgiveness and care for others. Today we are still “Christ-ones,” bearing proudly His name engraved on our hearts.

The church in Antioch was not only evangelistic. It was also caring. When Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, arrived in Antioch, he predicted through the Spirit that a famine would spread throughout the Roman Empire, which happened during the reign of Caesar Claudius, who died in AD 54. The disciples, “each according to his ability,” gave generously to provide aid for their brothers and sisters in Judea. This gift was sent to Jerusalem under the care of Barnabas and Saul.

## Physical, Social, Moral and Spiritual Needs Met

It is not enough to only preach the Gospel to other peoples. We must also be attentive to their physical, social and moral needs. Some today emphasize only physical care, which is vital and good in itself. Some emphasize only proclamation and ignore the pressing need about them for the basics of physical existence.

Both are necessary, however. Those with empty stomachs have difficulty hearing the message of Christ. And those whose stomachs are filled, but not their minds and hearts, are still left with a spiritual hunger.

Should we use benevolence as a tool to reach others' hearts? Certainly, but it should never be used as a bribe, to induce people to be baptized. The church is not a welfare agency, as such. Wholesale caring for others' needs is laudable, but can easily produce “rice Christians” — those who follow Christ only as long as the food supply lasts. Jesus

accused a multitude of Jews of merely following Him for the bread He could provide (Jn. 6:26). I know of many cases today of constructive benevolence that have resulted in strong Christian churches, and of other cases of not-so-constructive benevolence that resulted in weak and dependent churches. Benevolence and evangelism go hand-in-hand, but there must be no strings attached to the help we give other people or countries. Antioch didn't say to Judea, "Look, we will help you, but will expect you to help us," or "We will loan you some money, but will expect it back with interest."

## Chapter 9

# Saul and Barnabas Chosen for Mission

Acts 13:1-3

It was a profitable work in Antioch. Barnabas, Saul and their colleagues were seeing fantastic growth and maturation in the Antioch church. They could stay there for years planting and harvesting souls. Or could they? No, the Holy Spirit had other and greater plans for Barnabas and his brother from Tarsus. The Spirit revealed to the group of prophets and teachers in Antioch,

“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2).

They might have responded, “What do you mean, Lord? They are doing a great work here. They are needed. Can’t we just keep our team together?”

### Barnabas and Saul Sent to the Field

Thankfully, they didn’t question the Spirit’s guidance. They fasted and prayed, and then placed their hands on them and sent them off. I don’t imagine they even began to understand the implications or far-reaching effects of this divine order, but the important thing is that they obeyed it. They not only obeyed it, but did so in style, with a period of fasting, prayer and laying their hands on the two as a sign of dedication to the task before them.

My wife and I were part of a team that pioneered the work in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. We were all gathered in Los Angeles, awaiting the departure of the Japanese liner, *Argentina Maru*, that would be our home for a month, as it turned out. The night before departure we met in a local church building with minister Gordon Teel and others close to us. We all fasted together, prayed for hours, heard exhortations, and then experienced their laying their hands on us, to commend us to God’s care in this new work. This was a rare blessing, giving us the real sense of being set apart for a very important task.

## Shying Away from Clear New Testament Practice

It is a shame that all who are to embark on a new mission for the Lord, whether it be locally, in our nation or elsewhere, do not enter it with the warmth of ministers' and elders' hands on their heads. It is a shame that, more commonly, their service is launched with "good luck" instead of fasting and much heartfelt prayer. We who claim to follow precisely the New Testament are ill-at-ease with some of its clear practices. One is fasting. Judging by the fact that so many of us are overweight, we could use a good regimen of fasting. But beyond that, fasting is an essential part of the dedicated Christian life. Yet another is the laying on of hands. We shy away from it, because we feel it smacks of Pentecostalism or the Charismatic Movement. Is that any valid reason to neglect it, when we see it practiced in the New Testament, not today as an act of imparting the miraculous but of commending people to God's care as they go out to preach His Gospel (Acts 13:3)?

Being set apart for a noble mission is one of the most significant events in our lives. Of course, we are set apart at baptism for a lifetime of faithful service. But there are other special times and events when we should be especially dedicated to the task before us.

So often in the case of missionary service those hoping to go a mission field approach various congregations, in the hopes of finding one that will agree to sponsor them. This is not the way in which it happened in Antioch. Men of the congregation were selected by the Lord for a special task. The church for which I am an elder has a developing reputation of sending out its own young couples to other lands. This is preferable in many ways because they are already known by the members. In the case of our going to Brazil, a church in Texas we didn't even know, sought us out and offered to be our sponsor. This relationship continued for some 22 years. This doesn't occur often, but is laudable.

## Setting Apart Special Servants

However it is done, setting apart servants for a special service is essential to the world mission of the church. Elders must be alert to the mission field, to the preparation and sending of those under their care, and to opportunities that arise from outside the congregation. It is not our task to hold onto those who are capable and dedicated to reaching new regions

of the world for Christ. Rather, it is our honor to help prepare them and send them on their way with our support and blessings. Antioch missed Barnabas and Saul. But an even greater field lay before the two men, a field to which they were called by the Lord Himself. Even so, we miss those we send out, but we realize we cannot hang on to them. We must let them go with our blessings to their far-reaching assignment.

## Chapter 10

# Resisted and Persecuted in Asia Minor

Acts 13:4-14:28

Barnabas and Saul, along with Barnabas' cousin, John Mark, had their marching orders. They had received a prayerful send-off by the Antioch church. But where were they to go? They needn't have given it a thought, because the Holy Spirit was their travel agent, so to speak. He would guide them on their way.

In the case of our going to Brazil, we could look back and see divine guidance at work, not through a miraculous leading but through opening and closing doors. I had grown up with a heart for missions, instilled in me by my grandparents and parents. I had written many articles on missions for *The Christian Chronicle* and other publications. When I read in the *Chronicle* about a team forming in my own home state, Oregon, for service in Brazil, my interest was immediately aroused. Then Otis Gatewood and B.D. "Uncle Barney" Morehead prodded me along to serve in Brazil. I was responsible for public relations and publications at Pepperdine, then still a college. We had five children. How could I find support? I didn't have to. Support came to us — full salary, travel funds, working fund and other aid, without even asking. That sealed the matter. To Brazil we would go, for five years. Those five turned into 18, by the Lord's grace.

### First Stop on the Tour

Back now to Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas' homeland was the island of Cyprus, so that was their first stop. They preached in Salamis and then traveled on to Paphos, headquarters of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. This man had an enquiring mind. He wanted to hear the word of God, so he sent for the two preachers. There was a bug in the system, however. Sergius Paulus had a Jewish sorcerer on his payroll, apparently. This man, Bar-Jesus (Son of Jesus), or Elymas, opposed their teaching and tried to turn the proconsul from his budding faith in Christ.

Saul wouldn't stand for this, not for a minute! Filled with the Spirit, he looked straight at Elymas, telling him,



“You child of the devil! You enemy of right! You are full of deceit and trickery. Why do you keep on perverting the Lord’s ways? The Lord’s judgment against you is blindness.”

There is a time to speak up against evil, and Saul did, not mincing any words. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, amazed at the apostles’ teaching about Jesus.

## On to Asia Minor and Persecution

Then the three sailed on to Asia Minor (modern Turkey), landing at Perga. There Mark must have gotten cold feet or was homesick for mama, for he headed back home. Paul and Barnabas then headed inland to Pisidian Antioch. From this point on, Saul was called Paul, his Greek name. In the synagogue Paul was invited to speak, relating briefly Jewish history, which pointed to Jesus. He showed them how Jewish leaders, not recognizing Jesus for who He really was, had Him killed. He warned his hearers not to turn a deaf ear, as their compatriots in Jerusalem had done.

The two men were invited back the next week. A huge crowd came out to hear them. When the Jews saw this, they were jealous and spoke against Paul’s teaching. The two then turned from them, announcing that they would go to the Gentiles with their message.

Among the Gentiles they found a ready ear. The word of the Lord soon reached out to that entire region. When what we proclaim about Jesus and salvation in Him is rejected, we are not to waste any more time on that group of people. More than once in Brazil it was my sad duty to close out a work that was proving to be counter-productive. Work among the Jews in this case was also counter-productive. They not only rejected the message, but persecuted the messengers, running them out of town.

They went on to Iconium, where they were highly successful in reaching hearts. But again, Jews stirred up trouble against them. Some sided with the apostles and some with the Jews. A plot was soon hatched to stone Paul and Barnabas. If you hate the message, then kill the messengers! But the two found out about the plot and fled to Lystra and Derbe.

## Pagan Response to Paul and Barnabas

In Lystra, early on, they healed a man lame from birth. That drew the city’s attention. Speaking in their native Lycaonian tongue, the people shouted, “The gods have come down to us!” The priest of Zeus brought

bulls to sacrifice to them.

Do you suppose that such a thing can happen today? Yes, unfortunately. One time in Brazil Pope John Paul II visited our city. As he rode by in his Popemobile, many people shouted, “The Pope is our God! The Pope is our God!” I shuddered when I heard this idolatrous chant. I don’t know if he heard it or not, or if he even understood what was being said. My hope was that he simply didn’t hear or understand the blasphemy being shouted.

The two apostles had difficulty convincing the crowd that they were only men, not gods. They then preached about the true God of Heaven and how He provides all that we need. They still could hardly restrain the people from worshipping them.

Humans are fickle, however. When Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, bent on revenge, they won the crowd over. The mob grabbed up Paul, stoned him and dragged him out of the city, supposing they had killed this “troublemaker.” He revived, however, and returned to the city with the disciples he had converted.

## Could God Have Intervened?

Why did this happen? Couldn’t God have prevented it? Of course He could have, but He didn’t. Jesus had told His disciples that “in this world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Again, the Lord told Ananias, just before he went to Saul to teach him the way of salvation, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:16). Paul had caused much suffering. During his decades of Christian service he would suffer much. He had been forgiven of his sins against God’s people, but there was a steep price of suffering ahead of him. Lystra was only the opening chapter of this suffering.

What is the price of our service? Some of us are still being martyred for our faith. Some of us are imprisoned. Some are forced out of their target countries. Some of us are blocked, document-wise. Some suffer serious illnesses and death on the field. Some receive inadequate support. Yet courageous souls among us continue to go where none or few have gone before, impelled by the same Spirit that moved Paul and Barnabas.

## Chapter 11

# Jews First and Then Christians?

### Acts 15:1-35

“Tradition!” sang Tevye in the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. He was both celebrating and perhaps spoofing the hold that tradition had on Jewish people. Tevye expected his daughters to fall in line with the matchmaker’s selection of mates for them. Instead, the girls chose men they loved. Scandalous! They showed no respect for tradition.

Many Jewish people have always been tradition-bound. They are scrupulous about eating only kosher food and using only kosher clothing and furniture. On our ship enroute to Brazil, an elderly Jewish man died. The ship put into a unscheduled port, so authorities could care for this matter. A casket was brought aboard for him, but his widow would have no part of it. It hadn’t been made by kosher standards.

### Jewish Christians and Tradition

Jewish Christians in the early church still held onto some of their national traditions, one of these being circumcision. So when some went from Jerusalem to Antioch, they began to insist that Gentile men had to submit to circumcision in order to be saved. And not only circumcision, but submission to the entire Law of Moses. This caused fireworks from Paul and Barnabas, who had been converting many Gentiles without any such requirement.

Things got so heated that a commission of Paul, Barnabas and other disciples was sent to Jerusalem to resolve the matter with the apostles and elders. They reported enroute on their successes in bringing Gentiles to Christ. This news was well received everywhere.

In Jerusalem, Jewish Christians, who were also Pharisees, stood up and demanded that Gentiles first be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses, before they could become Christians. In other words, Gentiles had to become Jews, in order to enjoy the blessings of the Christian life.

The apostles and elders in the Jerusalem church considered this matter at length. Rightly so, because it struck right at the heart of the Christian faith. Peter reminded the assembly that God had made no distinction

between Jews and Gentiles in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10). He and his family and friends had been purified by faith. It was through the grace of Christ that they had been saved. Then why, he asked, burden Gentiles with the Torah's yoke, which none of the Jews had been able to bear?

## The Practical Advice of James

After Paul and Barnabas had related all of the wonders the Lord had done through them among the Gentiles, James, the brother of Jesus and a major leader in the Jerusalem church, spoke up. He quoted Amos 9:11-12, which had foretold the restoration of both Jews and Gentiles who bore the Lord's name. He then offered his judgment in the matter:

Gentile Christians were to "abstain from food offered to idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals and blood" (Acts 15:20).

This pleased the whole church, so a letter was written to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, reiterating these points. Why were they important?

Young Gentile Christians, having recently come out of idolatry, might succumb again to it by eating meat they knew had been sacrificed to a pagan god. Or at least, they might have a guilty conscience about eating such meat. The meat of strangled animals meant that the blood was still in the carcass. Blood symbolized life and had always been prohibited as food. As early as the days of Noah, the Lord had prohibited eating meat that still had its lifeblood in it (Genesis 9:4). Finally, sexual license was a hallmark both of idolatrous worship and everyday life among Gentiles. Christians were to lead a different kind of life, entirely separate from the idolatrous and sensual lives they had led earlier.

This important document was sent to Antioch with Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas. The latter two, highly regarded church leaders and prophets, would confirm the authenticity of this message. The letter was received with great joy by the church.

## What Does This Mean for Us?

What does this letter mean for us today? Nearly all of us Christians are Gentiles by background, rather than Jews. Therefore, we are under no obligation to the Law of Moses, not even the observance of Jewish dietary laws, keeping the Sabbath or other requirements of the Law. We do not have to be Jews first and then Christians. We are free in Christ

(Romans 8:21) and are to share with all others this same freedom. Yet our liberty must never be turned into license to indulge our own sinful nature (Galatians 5:13). Some of us have the attitude, “What’s yours is mine, so I will take it if I can.” Or we say, “What’s mine is mine, so I will keep it if I can.” The first is outright evil and is behind all kinds of robbery, scam and other efforts to exploit others. The second is sinful because it is selfish. Our liberty in Christ calls on us to have a third mentality: “What’s mine is yours and I will give it if I can. I will be careful not to be a stumbling block for others. I will use my freedom in Christ to draw others to it.” This was Paul’s attitude and should be ours also.

## Chapter 12

# Paul Has a Dream

Acts 15:36-16:10

Martin Luther King had a bold dream that helped change the course of African-American history in our nation. Dreams can do that. Joseph dreamed and his family's story came to be centered in Egypt. King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed and both his history and that of the world were revealed to him by Daniel. An angel appeared in dreams to Joseph, Mary's espoused, advising him that the baby she was bearing was of the Holy Spirit, and then after Jesus' birth, warning him to flee with Mary and the infant to Egypt.

And Paul had a dream. He and Barnabas had parted company over the earlier lapse of John Mark, who had left them part-way through their first journey. As they prepared to leave on their second missionary tour, Barnabas insisted on taking Mark along. Paul insisted that he not accompany them. Their disagreement was so sharp that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas as his traveling companion.

### Who Was More Correct?

Who was more correct in their argument? Perhaps Barnabas, because Mark later turned out to be a valuable companion to Paul, wrote the Gospel of Mark and then was a companion of Peter. Or perhaps Paul was more correct, not wanting to be saddled with an immature young man. All Mark needed, possibly, was time to grow up.

Unfortunate disputes arise among God's servants, even on the mission field. Emotions run high and such disputes are not always settled amicably. I recall one incident in our work in Brazil in which our mission teamed separated from one of our co-workers. It seemed necessary at the time, but later communication was restored and a new relationship with him was forged. So it was in the case of Mark and Paul.

### Timothy Recruited for the Team

Paul and Silas traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Arriving at Lystra, they added a young man, Timothy, to

their team. Strangely enough, Paul circumcised him before they continued on their journey. He did so because Timothy's mother was Jewish and Paul wisely wished to avoid any problems with Jews in the region over Timothy. It was a matter of sensitivity to their mentality and not a requirement. Later on Paul had strong words about Jewish Christians who insisted on circumcising Gentile believers (Gal. 5:1-15).

From the route of their earlier journey, Paul and his companions then went through Phrygia and Galatia. The Holy Spirit blocked them from going to the province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital, and then from Bithynia. So they continued on to Troas, the ancient fabled Troy. Now where to go? The Aegean Sea sparkled before them. Should they cross it?

## All Doubt Removed, As the Team Heads for Europe

All doubt was soon removed. One night in Troas, Paul had a dream. In it he saw a Macedonian begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Macedonia was in Europe, not Asia, where Paul had served until then. It was the northern province of Greece and had been Alexander the Great's homeland. Joining them in Troas was Dr. Luke, a Christian physician who appears often in the rest of Acts and who wrote both Luke and Acts.

Concluding that God had called them to preach the Gospel in Macedonia, they set sail for the cities of Macedonia, where they had both great success and great opposition. Opening up new regions to the Gospel is always a mixed blessing. It brings successes and failures, acceptance and opposition. During our long stay in Brazil we enjoyed moderate success, which since has blossomed into many congregations, some of which are large and have their own meeting places, elders, deacons and evangelists. Some are now even sending families out to other cities to initiate the Church.

We also faced opposition from some other religions and much spiritual indifference and ignorance. We saw members lapse into worldly behavior and leave our fellowship. We were ridiculed and told, "Yankee, go home!" My answer once to that order was, "I'll be home in about ten minutes!" We were the subject of spiritist hexes. We faced daunting documentation and even a U.S. Internal Revenue review. (No, nothing ever came of it, thankfully.) Never, however, were we imprisoned or expelled from the country.

## Opposition Can Be Deadly

In some countries opposition is much more dangerous. Once on a lonely road in Nigeria, a Christian, Dr. Robert Whitaker and his wife, Annette, were accosted by gun-toting insurrectionists who threatened to kill him. Annette intervened, reminding them that he was their doctor. He delivered their babies. So they let him go, but it could just have easily gone the other way.

Whatever the cost, modern Pauls and Silas's go into virgin territory with the message of Christ. Facing whatever is before them, they have a burden for the lost. Praise God for them.



## Chapter 13

# Life in a Philippian Jail

Acts 16:11-40

Philippi, named after Alexander the Great's father, was a Roman colony, located in eastern Macedonia, a short distance inland from the seaport of Neapolis and on the major Roman road to Dyrrachium, a seaport on the western side of Macedonia and the jumping-off place to Italy.

The Sabbath rolled around, but in this colony there was no Jewish synagogue. Apparently the ten Jewish men required to organize a synagogue could not be found there. So what few Sabbath observers there were met outdoors by a river. I can recall meeting under a tree, outside of an humble home, around a campfire, on a beach and in other improvised places in various countries. This is what occurred in Philippi. Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke searched for a likely spot and found a group of women meeting there. Paul took advantage of the opportunity to speak about Jesus.

### Lydia Converted

One listener was Lydia, a merchant of purple cloth from Thyatira, in Asia Minor. She was well-off financially, since purple, the cloth of royalty and other officials, was expensive. The Lord opened her heart and she responded favorably to Paul's teaching. She and her household were soon baptized. Then she invited the traveling team to stay at her home, a generous offer.

The infant church was off to a grand start, but Satan never accepts that lying down. Before long, trouble hit Paul and his companions. One day as they were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl who was a fortune teller, or so it was claimed, followed them. She shouted the truth for once,

“These men are servants of the Most High God. They are telling you how to be saved.”

And this continued for many days. Finally Paul had enough. He commanded the spirit to leave her in the name of Jesus. Suddenly she had no more power. Since she had gained her owners a fortune, they were irate and dragged Paul and Silas to the authorities.

## Paul and Silas Beaten and Imprisoned

As so often happens when ill-gotten gain is lost, charges are trumped up out of revenge. The slave owners accused Paul and Silas of being Jews who were creating an uproar and advocating customs unlawful for Romans to practice. Notice that they didn't specify any details, but what they said was enough to stir up a crowd of onlookers. The magistrates stripped the two of their clothing and had them severely flogged. Roman flogging was no light punishment. As accurately portrayed in the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, prisoners were unmercifully beaten with leather whips like a cat-of-nine tails, that had pieces of metal and glass sewed into the multiple ends of the whips. And this went on, times without number.

Severely injured, the messengers were then thrown into prison, in all probability a dark, cold, stone structure having no comforts whatsoever, with their feet fastened into stocks. This meant that they couldn't even lie back comfortably. So they were bitterly complaining at the injustice of it all ... or were they? Actually, They were singing hymns, and the other prisoners were listening!

Suddenly an earthquake struck, the doors flew open and all of the prisoners' chains came loose. The jailor, awakened from sleep and seeing the doors open, was about to take his own life. Under Roman law, if a jailor permitted a prisoner to escape, he paid for it with his own life. But Paul shouted to him, "Do not harm yourself! We are all here!" Amazing! The prisoners could have fled, but no one did.

## Hard-bitten Jailor Converted

The jailor rushed in and fell before the two messengers, asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

How did he know to ask this? Did he see from the earthquake and its aftermath that these were really men of God? Or, had he heard them preaching earlier? We don't know, but we do know that Paul and Silas told him what to do — believe in the Lord Jesus. Many people would conclude from this that only faith is necessary for salvation, but let's read on. Then they spoke God's word to all in the jailor's house.

It was still the middle of the night, but the jailor washed Paul and Silas' wounds, unthinkable for a hard-bitten jailor in the Roman world to do. Then he and his household were baptized. So there's your answer,

in part. The jailor and his family not only believed, but also submitted to baptism, probably in some nearby water tank or pond. Then the jailor took them back into his home and gave them a meal, again unheard of in those days. He and his family were filled with joy that they had come to believe in God.

## Paul Applies His Roman Citizenship

The next morning, city officials send officers to the jail to have Paul and Silas released. Paul would have none of that. He said,

“They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens.”

No citizen could suffer punishment until after he or she had been found guilty in a court of law. Then Paul added,

“Do they want to get rid of us quietly. No! The officials must come and escort us out.”

This would have been an embarrassment for the city fathers and an admission of error on their part. Later on, Paul would again use his citizenship to guarantee him a fair hearing.

So the magistrates came and appeased the two, escorting them from the prison. “Now please leave our city,” they said in parting. Paul and Silas went to Lydia’s home, where they encouraged their new brothers and sisters in the faith and then left.

## Trials and Persecutions Will Come

Will trials and persecutions come to Christians, especially if they are working in a region in which there is civil unrest or resistance against their teaching? Certainly! They may even be imprisoned, beaten or beheaded. This is unjust, but we live in an unjust world. Hebrews 11 graphically describes some of what faithful men and women of the past faced. The closest we ever came to dangerous treatment on the field was when the death hex was put on us. Fellow Christians asked, “Aren’t you afraid of the hex?” “No,” I answered, “I’m only fearful that someone may try to help it along.”

## Chapter 14

# Two Jewish Communities, One Closed, the Other Opened

### Acts 17:1-15

What a difference there is among cities and regions. Some are closed to the Gospel, at least officially. This is very much true in countries under Islamic control. Even conducting corporate worship is illegal. Attempting to convert others to Christianity is punishable by banishment or death. Other nations are so post-modern that they are scornful of the “superstition” that is the Christian faith. Yet others are ignorant of Christian doctrine and do not realize their ignorance. Thankfully, however, there are regions of the world that are receptive to the Gospel.

### Case Study of Two Extremes

The cities of Thessalonica and Berea are case studies of two extremes. In Thessalonica, a thriving city to the southwest of Philippi, Paul went first to the Jewish synagogue. As a Jewish rabbi he could receive a hearing during the Sabbath worship. For three Sabbaths he reasoned with the attendees from the Scriptures, proving that Jesus, the Messiah, really did suffer, die and was raised from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you,” he affirmed, “is the Christ” — the one they had longed for all of their lives.

Some Jews believed and joined Paul and Barnabas in the faith. Along with them was a large number of God-fearing Greeks and several prominent women of the city.

This aroused the ire of the Jews. Here were “nobodies” coming unannounced into their midst and drawing off many people after them! This they would not tolerate, so they rounded up some questionable characters, formed a mob and started a riot. They rushed to the home of Jason, a newly-converted Christian and apparently a man of influence, in search of Paul and Silas. When they were frustrated in their search, they dragged Jason and some other Christians before the city officials. They shouted,

“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have come here. Jason welcomed them. They defy Caesar’s laws, saying that there is another king, called Jesus.”

The crowd and officials were in a turmoil. Not knowing what to do, they made their prisoners post bond and then released them. When night came, the brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea, a city between Thessalonica and Athens.

## The Noble Bereans

Again, the two went first to the synagogue, where the Jews, of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, received the message eagerly and searched the Scriptures daily, to see if what Paul was saying was true. With such receptive minds, many Jews believed, along with prominent Greek men and women.

Word soon got back to Thessalonica about the whereabouts of Paul and Silas. So a group of Jews from there hurried to Berea, stirring up the crowds against Paul. Fearing for his safety, the brothers sent Paul to the coast, accompanied by several men, while Silas and Timothy remained behind in Berea. Paul sent word back to them to join him as soon as possible.

## Mixed Motivations Toward Salvation

Wherever the Gospel is preached, some societies and individuals are favorable toward it, as in Berea. It is a joy to share the message of Christ with those who are eager to hear it and respond to it. Some eager hearers, however, are out to receive more than salvation. They want material help or financial gain.

Such people are called “rice Christians.” Those of us who have worked in other countries have seen this phenomenon over and over. Amazing growth is seen in the church, as long as the goodies keep showing up. I know of one case, firsthand. People in a poverty-stricken part of our city were given U.S. government surplus food for a long period, and the church there blossomed. Hundreds came to worship. Many were baptized. Then the source dried up and most of those eager families dried up also. The church dropped rapidly from hundreds to only dozens in attendance.

In another case, in the deep interior of Brazil, we had a contact who appeared to be genuinely interested in God’s Word. We made several trips there, teaching and finally baptizing him and some others. We helped them rent a building and begin meeting. Our aid continued for some time, but, since they communicated nothing whatsoever to us, we

finally stopped sending the rent money. On our next trip there, we found out that they had switched their allegiance to another religious group that promised them monetary help.

## Jesus Had the Same Problem

This is nothing new. Jesus had multiplied the five loaves into food for a multitude. Now those present wanted to crown him king of the Jews on the spot. “Free bread for life! What is not to like about that?” Knowing their intent, Jesus disappeared from them. When He showed up again in Capernaum, they sought Him out. He told them,

“You ate the miraculous provision of bread and want more. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life” (John 6).

When He went on to declare Himself the Bread of Life, they grumbled, not wanting that kind of bread. Many, even of His disciples, left Him, because He didn’t give them what they wanted. He offered them far richer spiritual food, which they refused.

The Bereans were not like this, but were genuine in their interest and diligent in their Bible study. Praise God for them. There is no mention that Paul worked any healings there, nor did He promise them any material aid. Yet, many of them turned to Christ.

Although some in Thessalonica gladly received Paul’s message, the mentality of most of the Jews was different. There is no mention of their opening the scrolls and searching the Scriptures. Not only this, they were easily angered and stirred up a mob to do damage to the messengers and their following. And, as had happened in Iconium and Lystra, they followed Paul and attempted to have him killed.

## Prudence in Helping Others

There are genuine physical, medical and other needs on the field. However, we must exercise great prudence in how we go about helping others. They can so easily become dependant and expect help for life, when they should be learning how to become self-sustaining and able eventually to reach others with the Gospel, and to help them.

Lord, give us more Bereans to teach and convert! In all probability, they will become mature in the faith fairly rapidly and will be ready to share in the task of opening other hearts and fields to Christ’s call.

## Chapter 15

# Paul Gives a Lesson on Christian Evidences

Acts 17:16-34

There was no place like ancient Athens. In its prime it was a marvelous city, filled with magnificent temples, schools, libraries and government buildings, topped off by the Acropolis, an imposing rocky tableland, crowned with the beautiful Parthenon, Erecthium and other marvels of Greek architecture. The city also boasted a host of statues of every conceivable god, one for each person's taste. Athens was the intellectual center of the world. Renowned philosophers, artists and writers made their home there.

While Paul was waiting in Athens for his team to catch up with him, he became distressed over the abundance of idols he saw. Here an idol, there an idol, everywhere an idol! On the Sabbaths he reasoned with the Jews and God-believing Greeks. Then during the week he went to the extensive forum, or marketplace, where he discussed the faith with anyone who would listen. These marketplaces were not like today's malls. They were places for socializing and sharing ideas, as well as buying and selling. The Athenians and foreigners there lived for hearing and talking about the latest ideas.

Before long, a group of philosophers gathered to dispute with Paul. They represented two extremes of Greek philosophy. The Stoics, as their name implied, were frugal and self-disciplined. The Epicureans were, as the slogan went, believers in "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die." They were brilliant, but hedonistic, as some university professors today. The two groups were strange bedfellows on this occasion, but were curious about Paul's teaching about Jesus and the resurrection.

So they took Paul with them to the Areopagus, or assembly, on Mars Hill. This hill is about the height of a two-story house and had on its rounded top a meeting area. It was there that they asked Paul to explain his new teaching.

"You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears," they told him, "and we want to know what they mean."

Paul never missed an opportunity to preach. He stood up and said, “I see that in every way you are very religious. As I walked around and examined your objects of worship, I even found one with these words, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ What you worship as unknown I want to proclaim to you.”

This is an excellent example of beginning where an audience is and relating to it. Paul used an open window to their minds and hearts. He then went on to explain that the God who made all things doesn’t live in human temples, such as the sparkling white Parthenon on its promontory above them. Nor is He served by human hands, “for He Himself gives all men life and breath and all things.”

Not only this, he said, but from one man God made every nation of human beings. He determined the times set for them and the places in which they would live. What an amazing thought! Our Creator knows exactly who we are, where we are and how long we will live. He knows what we can do with our lives, if we just listen to His promptings.

God did all of this, Paul added, so that we might seek and find Him, although He is not far from us. He is not remote on Mt. Olympus, where the Greeks thought Jupiter dwelt. He is nearby. He can be reached in an individual way. “In Him we live and move and have our being,” Paul declared. He backed up his assertion by quoting from their own poets, “We are His offspring.”

Therefore, said Paul, we should not think that God is an image of gold, silver or stone made by human artisans. Brazil has a patron “goddess,” Nossa Senhora de Aparecida. This goddess’s image is about two feet tall. It was accidentally dredged up out of a river and became, “miraculously,” Brazil’s patron. One day an iconoclast (image breaker) took a hammer to the goddess and really did a number on it. Brazilians were aghast. Their patron had been destroyed. So they hired the best craftsmen they could find to restore the statue. When the work was completed, it was put inside a thick glass case, for its own protection. Imagine that! The patron goddess could not even protect herself. How, then, could she protect a nation?

Paul said that this kind of ignorance, God had overlooked, but now He has set a Judgment Day, at which time “He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.” Paul was talking, of course, about Jesus.



(By the way, this entire discourse is engraved in Greek and English on a large plaque at the foot of Mars Hill.)

At the mention of a resurrection from the dead, some sneered. They had seen many a dead person, and none had come back to life. Such an idea was totally foreign to their pragmatic senses. Others, perhaps still curious, asked him to talk with them further. At that he left the assembly, but not empty-handed. Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, believed and followed Paul. Along with him was a woman called Damaris, and several others.

Paul's reception in Athens was a mixed blessing. He whetted the curiosity of a number of well educated people, but there is no record that many actually followed through on what he taught. It is a strange contradiction that often the most learned people in a society are the ones who scoff at Christianity, who write papers and books against it and who influence many others to follow their agnostic or atheist lead. They will have much for which to answer in the Judgment. While such people should not be ignored by Christian messengers, more productive work can normally be done among the middle and lower middle classes. The very poor should not be ignored, but they are often so limited in education and economically dependent that they may with great difficulty ever rise to any leadership capacity in the church. There are exceptions, of course, but these are generalities that we have found to be true on the field.

## Chapter 16

# Tent-Making and Soul-Saving in Corinth

Acts 18:1-17

For many years my Dad was a tent-making preacher. Both in Oregon and California he initiated new congregations, circuit-riding on weekends to help them. Since they were just beginning, with a handful of members, they couldn't help him much financially. It was therefore necessary for him to work at a variety of occupations to pay our bills. As you can imagine, this was tiring, but he kept doing it for a number of years.

Following his example, all of my formal preaching was on the basis of limited help from small congregations. It was necessary to work in a church publishing plant, do commercial art work, teach part-time in public schools and do other services to supplement our income. My best experience was my first. In a new young church in Dallas, the members knew that I was working 44 or 45 hours a week at the publishers, so I had no more time than they to devote to church work. Therefore, nearly all of them pitched in to do their share.

### Tent-Making Missionaries

Many others have supported themselves while preaching. Missionaries historically have had to engage in other enterprises at times to make ends meet. Some tutored children of the wealthy, taught English, lectured in schools, repaired shoes or even supervised laborers on farms. One of the more famous was Paul, who was a tent maker by trade. Every Jewish male was to learn some occupation, apprenticing even as a boy. Paul was a learned scholar, but had been taught how to make tents, which were always in demand in the ancient world. When necessary, therefore, he supported himself at that trade, teaching at night and preaching on weekends. In fact, concerning the church in Corinth, he made it a point not to accept any financial aid whatsoever from those brothers and sisters, while at the same time accepting aid from the churches in Macedonia. We don't exactly know why, but it may have been a bad attitude on the part of the Corinthians toward him or toward any financial gain he might have received from them.

Paul had a marvelous work in Corinth, despite setbacks, false brothers and doctrines, envy and persecution. Jews in the synagogue became abusive, so Paul left it and went to the house of Titius Justus, a believer (perhaps a believing Gentile) and continued teaching there, right next door. This must have been galling for Jewish leaders, especially since Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his household turned to Christ.

## Even Paul Needed Encouragement

Even the great Paul needed encouragement. One night the Lord spoke to him in a vision, saying,

“Do not be afraid: keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-11).

This energized the apostle. It was like, “Sic em, Paul!” With this guarantee of divine help and protection, he remained in pagan Corinth another year and a half.

The Jews didn’t let up on their opposition to Paul. They hauled him to Gallio, the Roman proconsul, charging Paul with persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to their law. Gallio made short work of their complaint, telling them to settle their religious disputes among themselves, and ejecting them from the court. He even stood by as his associates beat Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue. (An interesting side note here is that a plaque from Gallio’s tenure is still there, naming him as proconsul, proof that the history of Acts is accurate, even in its details.)

## Our Purpose As Christians

Our purpose as Christians is to share Christ. This may require us to support ourselves while we do this. It may require great sacrifice. It may require suffering hostility, rejection or even persecution. Whatever the cost, the Lord has many people to be saved, so let us pay the cost and gladly go about fulfilling our purpose, with the Lord’s help.

## Chapter 17

# A Big Bonfire and a Noisy Riot

Acts 18:18-19:41

As I walked through the ruins of once-great Ephesus, I couldn't help but marvel at the beauty it had boasted. What remains standing is still impressive.

This was a major city of Paul's day, one of the three largest in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire. It was a busy port for sea traffic and a key location for travel and commerce eastward along one branch of the famed "Spice Road."

### The Massive Temple of Artemis

Ephesus was known throughout the empire for her massive temple of goddess Diana or Artemis, of which nothing is now left but the foundations, floor and a few broken columns. It was believed that the image of Artemis had fallen miraculously from Heaven and that Ephesus was its guardian. A lucrative business in silver miniatures of the image and temple provided "sacred" souvenirs for the many pilgrims who came there each year for purported healings and other blessings granted by Artemis. In fact, the image was considered the nourishing mother, with the front of her torso filled with breasts. Much sorcery and witchcraft went on, with people purchasing charms, amulets and scrolls of incantations. There was also a flourishing prostitute business, much of it linked to temple worship.

### Paul's Earlier Plans to Preach in Ephesus

It was to this city that Paul went twice. He had aimed for it earlier on his second journey, but that plan was aborted by the Holy Spirit, who instead sent Paul to Macedonia. It must have been a matter of timing, because later Paul did go to Ephesus.

Toward the end of his second journey he left Corinth, enroute to Jerusalem, taking Priscilla and Aquila, fellow tent-making Christians, with him to Ephesus. There he left them, but before continuing his journey, he reasoned with Jews in the synagogue. They asked him to remain

longer, but he refused, promising to return later, the Lord willing.

## Plan Finally Realized

After spending some time at his home base of Antioch, Paul embarked on his third journey, strengthening the churches throughout Galatia and Phrygia. Afterward he continued on westward by land, arriving finally in Ephesus.

One of his first acts in Ephesus apparently was his encounter with about 12 disciples who had been baptized according to John the Baptist's teaching. This was a baptism of repentance, looking forward to the coming of Christ and His Kingdom. Questioning their conversion, Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. Their answer was that they knew nothing about the Spirit. Paul proceeded to teach them more perfectly the way of Christ. They were then baptized into Christ and received the Holy Spirit.

## Millions "Baptized," but Not Saved

The lesson for us here is that millions of people have been "baptized" as infants, incapable of having faith, repenting or confessing Christ. They believe they are saved, yet have never been baptized as adult believers, according to the clear teaching of our Lord. They are therefore as yet unsaved. As Paul did, so should we: Teach them the Gospel of Christ more accurately.

## Initiating the Church in Ephesus

In Ephesus Paul broke his synagogue record. Normally it only took about three visits to a synagogue to see him expelled for his teaching. However, in Ephesus, he continued speaking boldly in the synagogue for a whole three months before some became obstinate and began to bad-mouth the Way.

So Paul left the synagogue, taking the believers with him. He was able to arrange the use of a lecture hall, so for two years he taught and discussed God's Word daily. His work was most fruitful, for by the end of that period, the longest of any of his stays during his journeys, all of the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia had heard the Word. This doesn't mean that all accepted his teaching and that of his associates, but

it does mean that all had access to the Truth.

We are not responsible for the growth of the Lord's cause. Our task is to plant and water the seed of God's Word. It is He who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). It is so easy to boast, "Look at what I have done. Look at all of the souls I have baptized. Look how the church under my preaching has grown." Wrong! Look at what the Lord has done. Look at how He has grown a church. Our part is essential, but it is the Lord who opens hearts, germinates the divine seed in them and gives them new life.

## Remarkable Evangelistic Success

Paul's efforts in Ephesus were remarkable. The Lord did extraordinary miracles through him, so that even when a piece of cloth that had touched him was taken to the sick, they were healed. This was done in a city devoted to counterfeit claims of healing through magical incantations and formulas. Paul's success at healing and casting out demons soon came to be copied. Seven sons of a priest named Sceva attempted to cast out demons, but the demon-possessed man turned on them and beat them up. This came to be known all over the region. As a result, the believers became more dedicated to Christ, confessing their evil deeds and bringing their scrolls of sorcery and charms for a huge public bonfire. The value of the scrolls was estimated at 50,000 drachmas; in other words, 50,000 days' wages! This astonishing act drew even more people to Christ.

## The Storm: Artemis vs. Jesus

Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, to meet him there shortly.

Meanwhile, a storm was brewing in Ephesus! Whenever the economy is threatened, people rise up in protest. The silversmiths saw their income dwindling, as more and more people became Christians. Silversmith Demetrius called a meeting of his fellow craftsmen. He told them how Paul had led countless people in the city and province away from the worship of Artemis, claiming that man-made gods were no gods at all.

"Men," he said, "there is danger that not only our trade will lose its good name (substitute here 'good income'), but also that the great goddess Artemis will be discredited and robbed of her divine majesty."

Demetrius got his intended response. The others were furious and began shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city

was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's traveling companions, and rushed to the amphitheater, an imposing outdoor structure, still almost totally intact. Paul wanted to go to the aid of his colleagues, but fellow Christians, and even officials who were friends of Paul, restrained him.

The uproar went on for two hours. The city clerk finally quieted the crowd. He added,

“If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance, they ought to take it to the proper officials. ... As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting, for which we cannot give a reason for it.”

This wise official knew that the wrath of Rome descended on any hint of disorder or rebellion, so he defused the situation and sent the crowd home.

### **Spiritual Success Draws Persecution**

With great success often comes great persecution, as in this case in Ephesus. Any threat against traditional gods or religions can be met with violence. As time passed in the first century and following, Christianity came to be viewed (wrongly) as a threat to the Empire, so it was severely persecuted by various Caesars and governors. It was growing rapidly. Its followers refused to serve in the military. They would not participate in official Roman celebrations and feasts. They would neither worship the official Roman gods, nor burn incense before the image of the Caesar. This made them traitors. They practiced, as it was reported, incest and cannibalism. So they were hunted down and imprisoned or killed. Test this out in today's world. Go to Saudi Arabia, attempt to convert Muslims, and see how you would be received. But you had better be ready for prison and/or death.

## Chapter 18

# Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

Acts 20:17-37

Of all of the churches with which I have served over the years, some of my fondest memories are of the little Beverly Hills congregation in Dallas. Shortly after its launching in 1952 I was asked to be its minister. I was working fulltime at a church publishing plant, so had very little time to devote to this infant group. The members all pitched in and served along with my wife and me. As a result, the group grew from 25 to about 75 members and went through two building programs in three years. A bond of love was forged and still continues with some of those pioneering members more than 50 years later.

### Churches Close to Paul's Heart

The church in Ephesus, along with those in Philippi and Thessalonica, were especially close to Paul's heart. He had left Ephesus after three or so fruitful years there, circulating throughout Macedonia and strengthening the faithful. He then spent a week with the church in Troas (the former famous Troy). Then he sailed on to the port of Miletus. While there briefly, he sent for the elders of the Ephesian Church, to give them a final touching exhortation, realizing that he would never again see them. Paul reminded the elders that while in their city he had served the Lord with humility and tears, overcoming the plots of the Jews against him.

Ah, humility! What an uncommon trait this is, yet so important. We do not serve the Lord out of our own abilities and strength. We serve because He enables us. He grants us the gifts and strength to accomplish what He sets before us. Humility is especially important on the mission field, where we struggle with the culture, language and different worldview of our host people. One of our colleagues walked into an ice cream shop and ordered ice cream. He blundered with only one letter. He wanted cheap (*barato*) ice cream, but instead asked for cockroach (*barata*) ice cream. What a difference the outcome! The clerk didn't even smile as he



answered, “Sorry, Sir, we don’t have that flavor.” A visiting campaigner in our city in Brazil, accompanied by our daughter, gave what he thought was a perfectly-memorized spiel in Portuguese to a lady who answered the door in a neighborhood home. What he said was, “We would like to invite you and your family to become pregnant.” Our daughter asked the homemaker if she understood what he had said. Her answer was, “I’m afraid so!” We need a large dose of humility in so many situations on the field.

## Teaching Only What Is Politically Incorrect

Paul went on to say that he had not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to the church. He had taught publicly and from house to house. He had declared to all that they must repent and have faith in Jesus. Paul’s example needs to be heeded today, when so many church leaders, preachers and teachers have softened the message of Christ, in order to be politically correct and not offend anyone. Faith and repentance are needed more than ever. A surprising editorialist interviewed Stephen Prothero, head of the Department of Religion at Boston University. In the interview Prothero reminds us that we were once a religiously literate nation, but no longer. Religious education has gone by the boards in universities and public schools, and has been watered down in churches. The Bible is either banned or made a sort of ornament, rather than a book that is actually being studied. It has become a flexible set of guidelines, rather than a set of laws (Jay Tolson, *U.S. News and World Report*, April 9, 2007, p. 28). David Miller, in a DVD series, shows clearly that our nation was solidly founded on Christian principles, but that now concerted efforts are being made, too often successfully, to remove God and Christianity from our institutions (Miller, *The Silencing of God*, Apologetics Press).

## Paul’s Admonition to the Elders

Paul revealed to the elders that he knew what lay ahead — prison and hardships. “However,” he added,

“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.”

What a sacrificial spirit! What priorities he had! He was innocent of the blood of all men. That is, he had given them an opportunity to hear the

saving message of Christ. He had declared the whole will of God. The ball was then in their court, to receive or reject it.

The apostle warned those elders to watch themselves and the flock entrusted to their care. They had been placed in their position by the Holy Spirit. They were to shepherd the church, which Jesus purchased with His own blood. He warned them that savage wolves would sneak up on the church, not sparing the flock. Even among themselves some would arise to divide the body, distorting the truth and drawing away disciples after them.

## Savage Wolves Still Threaten the Church

Nothing has changed. Savage wolves from both without and within the church still wreak havoc. Once in Brazil we had developed a fairly sizeable group of young men in the church. Then one of their own number enticed them away to Kung Fu, the exercise regime and philosophy of Confucius. The first thing we knew, half of our promising young men had disappeared. Charismatic leaders arise almost daily to begin new churches, attracting and entertaining thousands. They are everywhere in our city. I am reminded of the saying, “When the tide is out, every little shrimp has his own pond.” Every ambitious person or couple build their own pond and rule over those who follow them.

## More Blessed to Give Than to Receive

Paul had not coveted their gold, silver or clothing. He had worked at his trade of tent-making to support himself and his companions. By that kind of hard work he had given them an example of giving and helping the weak. He even quoted a teaching of Jesus that does not appear in the Gospels as such: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

This is a much-needed lesson for today. Even those serving fulltime in the Kingdom sometimes covet a bigger and better salary, along with all possible fringe benefits. If they don’t receive what they feel they deserve at one church, they are “called” to another that gives them more of what they want. They have lost sight of the sacrificial spirit of Christian service and are the poorer for it. Long gone are the days of pioneer missionary to Japan J.M. McCaleb, who taught English for a nickel an hour just to sustain his family on the field. I am not opposed to an adequate salary for both local ministers and missionaries, but I am concerned that in some

cases no real sacrifice is required, due to all the support they are receiving. Our salary on the field was adequate, but the demands on us took much of it for various projects and for families in need. We considered this all a part of our calling.

Paul left a weeping congregation which truly loved him and was distressed at his announcement that they would never see him again. My suffering a bout of polio caused my family and me to leave the beloved congregation in Dallas with which we had worked part-time for three years. The day we returned from Dallas to our family in California was tearful for all of us. And the day we left Brazil after 18 years of service there was also tearful. Many told us, “But you can’t leave! You are one of us.”

That wasn’t true of some places where we served. A few of the members were happy to see us leave. If we have served well and sacrificially, when the time comes to leave, tears should flow, not resentment.

## Chapter 19

# Paul's Conversion Story Retold

Acts 21:27-22:29

Paul had been aiming for Jerusalem and finally arrived there with Luke and eight others, including Timothy, despite frequent warnings that his life would be in jeopardy. One of his first acts was to deliver a sizeable gift from Gentile believers to their poor fellow Christians in Judea. He met with James and all of the elders in Jerusalem, recounting in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

The elders praised God, but then offered a suggestion to Paul. Thousands of believing Jews still practiced the Law of Moses, but had heard that Paul was teaching Jews throughout the Roman provinces to turn away from Moses and circumcision, and to ignore Jewish customs. Paul, of course, had done nothing of the sort, but to neutralize this rumor, they asked him to join with four men in their purification rites and to pay their expenses. This would prove, they believed, that Paul was still loyal to his Jewish heritage.

He agreed, which indicates the necessity to yield to others in the realm of expediency. Some find this difficult to do, because they hold to their opinion or wishes at all costs and the cost is often disruption and division. It is better generally to give in on non-doctrinal issues and matters of opinion than to insist on having our own way.

The next day Paul took the men and purified himself with them. Then he went to the temple and gave notice of the days of purification and the offering to be made for each of them.

However, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple and stirred up a mob, shouting,

“Men of Israel, this is the man who teaches everywhere against our people, our law and this place. Not only this, he brought Greeks into the temple area, defiling it!”

They had seen Trophimus, a Gentile Christian from Ephesus, with Paul in the city and assumed that Paul had brought him to the temple. When you are really out to get someone, it doesn't seem to matter whether your charges are true or false. They can still do great damage.

## Paul Threatened and Arrested

Seizing Paul, the crowd dragged him from the temple and tried to kill him. Just then the Roman commander arrived with some troops and rescued Paul. Binding him with two chains, the commander attempted to find out what the charges were against him, but could not, because of the uproar. So he took Paul to the barracks. The crowd was so violent that soldiers had to carry him, for his own protection.

Paul explained to the commander that he was a Jew from Tarsus, no ordinary city. He then asked permission to speak to the people. Standing on the steps leading to the barracks, he defended himself to the crowd in Aramaic (or possibly Hebrew). He rehearsed the story of his vision and conversion, including his baptism at the hands of the pious Christian Jew, Ananias, who told him to arise and be baptized, washing away his sins, calling on the name of Jesus.

## Beautiful Examples of Conversion

One time in Brazil we noted that one of our Bible correspondence course student, Angelica, had completed brilliantly all six of our courses. Although she lived in Recife, a thousand miles away, we decided to visit her. A few nights later I was teaching her in her home and saw that she had a good grasp of the New Testament, so I asked her, “Angélica, what are you waiting for? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” She answered, “I have been waiting all evening for you to ask!” So that night, in a calm moonlit lagoon of the ocean, I baptized her, the first in a work that three decades later numbers hundreds of members.

## A Key Question

The question Ananias asked Saul (the future Paul) must come up eventually in all Bible teaching to those outside of Christ. If we present our product (salvation in Christ), but never close the sale, so to speak, we leave our hearer adrift. He or she must be made to face a choice between Christ and lostness and be shown how to take on Christ. Quoting the “believer’s prayer” or signing a statement, “This day I accept Jesus as my personal Savior,” is not adequate. To be saved, each one must arise and be baptized, in order to have his or her sins washed away. This is plain

Bible teaching and no other way is provided in Scripture.

## Paul, a Roman Citizen

Back to Paul, when he told his listeners that the Lord had sent him to preach to the Gentiles, they shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live!” The commander, alarmed, ordered Paul to be taken to the barracks, where he would be beaten and questioned about his behavior. When soldiers stretched him out to flog him, Paul asked, “Is it legal to flog a Roman citizen who has not been judged guilty?”

When the centurion in charge reported this to the commander, he was alarmed, because he had put a Roman citizen in chains and intended to beat him without a trial. The centurion could have been punished severely for having done this to a fellow citizen. Law exists to protect, as well as to punish. Wherever we go in the world, we may have few rights as a foreigner, but those we have can be applied to help us, unless we are caught in some wrong.

## Chapter 20

# Turn Them from Darkness to Light

Acts 25:23-26:32

Having been spirited away by night from Jerusalem to Caesarea by Roman soldiers, to protect his life, Paul stood before Governor Felix, Governor Festus, King Agrippa II and his wife Bernice. Paul reasoned with Felix about faith in Christ and the governor's need for righteousness, self-control and God's judgment. This struck fear into the governor's heart, since he was a corrupt official and would soon be banished by Rome. However, he didn't release Paul, hoping that someone would bribe him to free his prisoner.

### Wrong is Wrong, Regardless

Wrong is wrong! The faithful follower of Jesus must sooner or later call it what it is, even at his or her own peril. This doesn't mean a vitriolic answer, but rather, one that is both clear and tactful. We are faced with many evils about us — homosexuality, pornography, adultery, divorce, abortion on demand, murder, thievery, lying, extortion, scams ... and the list goes on and on. We are also faced with every kind of religious doctrine and practice, much of which cannot be found in Scripture. We are faced in many places with spiritism and witchcraft, idolatry and superstitions of every kind. We, as God's spokespersons, must speak out against all of this clearly, concisely and in a kind manner.

Festus, a far more upright man than Felix, became governor and inherited Paul's case. At a total loss as to how to handle the matter, he wanted Paul to return to Jerusalem to be stand trial there. Paul's answer was, "I am standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried ... I appeal to Caesar!" Festus agreed and began arranging for Paul's transport to Rome.

Meanwhile, King Agrippa and Bernice made a state visit to the new governor. Festus presented this difficult matter regarding Paul to them, since they had a deep knowledge of Judaism, and even some acquaintance

with the Christian faith. He faced a dilemma over Paul. He had no clue whatsoever as to how to explain this case to Caesar. Agrippa expressed his desire to hear Paul for himself.

## Paul Pleads His Case

Paul presented his plea to Agrippa, including his background in the Jewish faith and his zeal as a Pharisee against Christianity. He reiterated his conversion and subsequent life. He then informed Agrippa that Moses and the prophets had predicted the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. At about that time Festus broke in with, “Paul, you’re mad. Your great learning is driving you insane!”

Paul denied the accusation, pointing out that what he was saying was true and reasonable. “The king is familiar with these things, for this was not done in a corner.” Then he asked Agrippa, “Do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Agrippa’s infamous answer was, in the King James Version, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” In the NIV the wording is, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Literally, the Greek says, “In a little me thou a Christian to make (act).” His response was one of denial. Even though he knew the prophets and may have known something of the Way, he could not abandon his position, or perhaps his life style, to become a Christian. Paul’s response in the Greek was,

“I would pray God both in a little and in great not only thee but also all the [ones] hearing me to-day to become such of what kind indeed I am, except bonds these.”

Agrippa had heard enough, so he, Bernice, Festus and the others gathered there walked out, commenting, “This man isn’t doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.” Agrippa agreed with Festus that Paul could have been set free, except for his appeal to Caesar.

## Our Part to Plant and Water

Paul said all he could to Agrippa, but there is no record that the king ever heeded his message. The king’s heart may have been touched a bit, but he couldn’t bring himself to accept Christ. Who knows? Perhaps the personal cost was too high. In our modern era we are number crunchers. We want to see visible and numerical growth. However, we need



to remember again that it is our responsibility to plant and cultivate the Word. The increase is in the Lord's hands.

We need to be far busier than we are, worldwide, with planting and watering God's seed. If we do that prayerfully and diligently, the increase will eventually come. It won't come in every case, because some hearts are hardened and the seed cannot penetrate them. In such cases we move on to more fertile soil.

## Chapter 21

# The Gentiles Will Listen

Acts 28:11-30

The Japanese freighter-passenger ship, *Argentina Maru*, sat in Long Beach, Calif., Harbor, being prepared for the next legs of its journey from Japan to Argentina, via the Panama Canal. Our mission team to Brazil — seven families and three singles — was excitably prepared for its epic journey (well, to us it was epic). Finally, word came, after a 36-hour delay, to board ship.

Everything was new to us — the safety drills, the Japanese meals, the cooks' ill-advised attempt to serve us an American meal, the games, the special events and even the postage-stamp size staterooms. We were enchanted by the Panama Canal crossing, and especially by the tiny yacht given its own turn in the locks, just as if it were an aircraft carrier. Also new to us was a severe storm in the Caribbean that beat and battered our ship. Margie and I held tightly to a rail as we stood below the wheelhouse, being drenched but exhilarated in the fierceness of the storm.

This wasn't all that slowed us down, however. In addition, there was a dock strike, an earthquake at the Venezuelan seaport of La Guaira, a Japanese widowed mother diving overboard, leaving her three little ones behind, and an elderly Jewish man dying of a heart attack. But 29 days after departure we arrived at the Brazilian port of Santos, where we disembarked and were greeted by the São Paulo mission team. It was a memorable journey, indeed!

### Nothing Like Paul's Dangerous Voyage

However, it paled in comparison to Paul's voyage from Caesarea to Rome as a prisoner. All went well until the Alexandrian grain ship with 276 people aboard was caught in the mother of all gales and carried with the wind for 14 days. Those aboard despaired for their lives, but Paul reassured them that the Lord would spare everyone. The ship finally reached the island of Malta, south of Italy, and was stranded on a bar, breaking up in strong cross currents. Everyone made it to shore safely,

just as Paul had said. On the island they were well treated and cared for. Paul healed the father of Publius, the chief official of the island. When the islanders learned of this, they brought their ill to Paul to be healed. After wintering there, another ship was contracted to carry this group to Italy. As Paul and his company, Aristarchus and Luke, prepared to leave for Rome on another ship, the locals honored them and provided the supplies they needed for the remainder of their journey.

After stops at Syracuse, on Sicily, and Rhegium, in southern Italy, they came to Puteoli, where brothers asked them to remain there for a week. Other faithful Christians met them at the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. Finally in Rome, Paul rented a house and lived there under guard for two years, as he awaited a hearing before the infamous Nero, at that time the Caesar.

## Paul Under House Arrest

While under house arrest Paul received many visitors, including the local leaders of the Jews. He explained his case to them. They replied that they had received no communication from Judea about him. However, they wanted to hear his views on this “sect” about which everyone was talking, often negatively.

On a set day a large number came to hear Paul. He spent the day reasoning with them from the Scriptures concerning Jesus. Some were convinced, but others refused to believe. Then Paul quoted 6:9-10 to them:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
You will be ever seeing but never perceiving.  
For this people’s heart has become calloused;  
they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes,  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their hearts  
And turn, and I would heal them.”

“Therefore,” announced Paul, “I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen.”

At that the leaders walked out on Paul. A few probably did become

Christians, but the large majority did not. That is still true today. There is a worldwide body of Messianic Jews who believe in Jesus, but most Jews have not believed in Him and still do not. So the Spirit speaking through Isaiah was right about them. This is unfortunate, but for many, leaving their tradition is unthinkable. As an added difficulty, they only accept the writings of the *Torah*, *Prophets* and *Wisdom* books, rejecting outright the *New Testament*.

They are not alone in this. Other major world religions, such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, accept Christ as a prophet or one of the gods, but not the true nature of Jesus or the New Testament Scriptures. Much sacrifice and perhaps even martyrdom awaits us when we ever begin to really consecrate on these religions.

## Preaching to One and All

Well, Paul spent two years in confinement. Boldly and unhindered, he preached both the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Eventually even some of the Praetorian Guards and some in Caesar's own household turned to Christ (Philippians 4:22, for instance). These were unlikely subjects for conversion, but our Lord always surprises us with those He draws into His kingdom. Paul got his wish to visit Rome, but not as he had anticipated (Acts 19:21, Romans 1:7). He actually went to Rome at the expense of the government. While in Rome at that time, or perhaps during a second imprisonment, he wrote his "prison letters" — Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy and Philemon. Paul's final words to Timothy (2 Timothy 4) indicate his understanding that his martyrdom was near. Yet he was at peace. He had run a good race. He had kept the faith and finished the course laid out for him by his Lord. May this be said by all of us as we come to our moment of departure for the next world.

## Chapter 22

# Not Ashamed of the Gospel

### Romans 1:8-32

Do you ever wish you could visit Israel, Greece or Rome? How about game preserves in Africa? Australia and New Zealand? Alaska? China or Japan? England or mainland Europe? I have been to Europe, Africa and Asia, but never to the South Pacific. My wife and I really long to take a trip to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands, but at our age and considering the expense involved, this will probably never happen.

Paul longed to travel, also. However, his hopes were centered on reaching Rome and Spain. When he wrote to the church in Rome, he hadn't yet arrived there as a prisoner. He explained in his letter to the Romans his longing to be with them, but he had been hindered up to that time. Paul's intent was always to work where other apostles or evangelists had not worked. This indicates that Peter was not in Rome earlier, nor was he there during Paul's imprisonments or his execution, which occurred in about the year 62. Otherwise, Peter would surely have been mentioned.

### Obligation to Preach Christ to All Peoples

Paul had a deep sense of obligation to Greeks and non-Greeks; to the wise and the foolish. He considered no one above him or below him, in education, to be beyond his reach with the Gospel. All were subject to the call of Christ. During our 18 years in Brazil I worked often with the lower classes, teaching in their tiny, dirt-floored homes or front yards. Once, while preaching in an humble home, a goat bounded through the door, onto a bed behind me and then out the window. On another occasion a large dog jumped in through a window and scattered the Lord's Supper all over a living room.

Some of my effort was also directed to the middle and upper-middle classes, people who — like Lydia in Acts 16 — had the means to help support the work, and the education to move into leadership roles. We had little success, however, among the wealthy and powerful, perhaps because I felt inadequate to approach them. Unlike me, Paul would have attempted to reach all classes, from nobility to slave.

## Color-Blind and Class-Blind Evangelism

You see, Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel. He recognized clearly that it was “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). It was a salvation that was color blind and class blind. It was for both the Jews and Gentiles. It was a message of righteousness for those who believe and continue in the faith.

On the other hand, for those who suppressed the Truth by their wickedness, godlessness and hardness of heart, the wrath of God was in store. Many people in all generations seem to think they can avoid God. They remind me of constant police chases in our area. I have noticed that, with the help of helicopters and global positioning devices, few of these fugitives can escape. Generally they end up crashing their cars and perhaps killing someone in their way. Yet, they obstinately continue trying to outrun the police. They must believe that they are too clever to be caught. Wrong! Likewise, absolutely no one who does evil escapes the wrath of God. He or she may try to hide from Him or ignore Him, but to no avail, no more than Adam and Eve could hide from God; no more than Cain or Achan, David or Ananias and Sapphira could hide their sins from the eternal Lord.

### Without Excuse for Not Believing

No one has the excuse that he or she didn't really know about God's existence and power. Ever since the creation, God's eternal power and nature have been clearly demonstrated (Romans 1:20). Look to the heavens and count the galaxies, if you can. Look to our own little planet and see what God has made. In the Fall, I plant dead-looking daffodil and tulip bulbs. Then in the Spring, by the miracle of rebirth, those bulbs come to life and produce a variety of colorful flowers. Geese migrate thousands of miles to the Arctic tundra to mate, lay their eggs and hatch several little goslings. Salmon return from the oceans to the very place where they were spawned, to repeat the cycle of new birth. The movie, *March of the Penguins*, graphically illustrated the annual trek of penguins across Antarctica to mate, hatch new baby penguins and care for them.

The wise man said, “To everything there is a season ...” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). To everything, there is infinite order. There is structure, often so complex that scientists are still trying to find the key to it all. The more we learn, the more there is to learn. The more we try to explain away God, the more foolish we look. It doesn't do to state that in the beginning there was just an accidental accumulation of energy, out of which came

the universe. No, it doesn't do, because those who claim that everything came from this initial concentration of energy cannot explain its source, so that explanation is no explanation.

All of mankind, said Paul, can see God's power through what He has created (Acts 17:24-28). Therefore, all are without excuse, no matter how many degrees they hold. Paul says that those who claim to be so wise have become fools.

## Godlessness Breeds Crime and Violence

It doesn't stop there, however. God gave the godless over, said Paul, to a depraved mind, sinful desires, sexual impurity and the degrading of their bodies with each other. Both men and women turned from the natural course of sex, to be inflamed with lust for those of their own sex. They became filled with every kind of depravity, greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, senselessness, faithlessness, heartlessness and ruthlessness. They abused their parents and families. Even knowing that those who do such things deserve death, they continued in them and approved of others who practiced the same kinds of filth.

Paul was describing the world of his day, but it is also the world in which we live today. Our city streets are filled with blood orgies. Our women and children are abused. We sink into a cesspool of sexual depravity and laugh about it. Pornography, drug addiction, abortion, marital infidelity, divorce and other evils reign.

## What Are We to Do?

What are we to do about it? First, we must admit that we live in a modern Sodom. Then we must clean up our own lives, with the Lord's help. Finally, we must begin applying, as never before, the salve the Lord has provided for bringing sight to the spiritually blind and balm to heal their depraved hearts. The answer has always been Christ, but how ineffective we so often are at introducing Him to others. Do you remember the song,

*"You never mentioned Him to me, You helped me not the Light to see. You met me day to day and knew I was astray, but never mentioned Him to me?"*

Instead of wringing our hands over the condition in which we find the world, we need to be ringing out the hope that Christ offers. I pray that none of us is ever ashamed of the Gospel or timid about explaining it to others.

## Chapter 23

# While We Were Still Sinners

## Romans 5:1-11

An American soldier in Iraq died recently: nothing unusual about that. In this case, however, there was something quite unusual. He dove on top of a live explosive device, sacrificing himself to save his buddies. For this selfless act he received posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Paul said in Romans 5, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.” In the case of Christ, a perfect man died, not just for the righteous, but also for every kind of sinner in this dark world. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” demonstrating in his own body God’s deep love for us. This happened at just the right time, in God’s eternal *kairos*, when we were all powerless.

### Unworthy of Christ’s Sacrifice?

It is perhaps relatively easy to believe that Christ would sacrifice Himself for good people, but much harder to believe that He would die for the likes of Nero, Domitian, Attila the Hun, Ivan the Terrible, Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and Muhammad Atta. Yet He did, and that is the miracle of it. Before we think that these evil men were unworthy of such love, let us look into our own hearts. Paul answered this notion in quoting from Psalms 5, 10, 14 and 140,

“There is no one righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.  
All have turned away, they have become totally worthless;  
there is no one who does good, not even one.”

That passage indicts all of us, in every generation and throughout all of the world. No, we did not deserve Christ’s death on our behalf, yet though totally undeserving, we can receive forgiveness and a new life in Him. Even when we were God’s enemies, we were still reconciled to Him through the death of His Son.



## Reconciliation Is a Beautiful Word

Reconciliation! What a meaningful word! A young single missionary in Brazil, Allen Dutton, fell in love with his Portuguese language teacher, Maria Toledo. She became a Christian and they eventually married, to the total dismay of her devout Catholic parents. Wealthy, they disowned her forever. She was no longer welcome in their home or with her family. That family excommunication continued for years ... until grandchildren showed up. Those little ones thawed the hearts of the grandparents and before long they and Maria were reconciled. At their death, they even willed their country estate to Maria and her family.

Reconciliation with God through His Son is a wonderful thing. We have all wandered at some time from Him, in some cases even to a “far country” of our own obstinate choosing or ignorance, as did the prophet Jonah in the Book of Jonah and the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. Yet the Father runs to us, to embrace us and restore us to sonship, if we are willing to take the first steps back toward Him.

## A New Life and a New Family

We Christians know the wonderful blessing we have in the Lord’s family. We not only have forgiveness, but a new family relationship, a new life, a new purpose, a new destination and a new mission to perform in His cause. We have it all, but we are so often miserly with it, not willing to share it with others, or at least, timid and fearful about reaching out to others who are still dying in their sins.

Do you believe that everyone outside of Christ has no hope? Do you believe that Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and those of so many religions and cults, foreign to the Gospel, are absolutely and totally lost? If you consider them lost, do you dismiss them as being outside the pale of God’s grace? The ancient Jews believed that only in Judaism was there salvation. The Muslims believe that only they — and even then only if Allah so wills — can they reach paradise. Many in the West today believe that a loving God will save everyone, so why mess with the minds of others?

## Only Baptized Believers Saved

The Word of God is clear on this matter. Only those who turn to Jesus in obedient faith and repentance, and then are baptized into Christ,

are saved. They are buried with Him in baptism, united with Him in His death, and then are raised from the water to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-8). The Lord, not we, includes those who are conformed to Christ in the likeness of His death in baptism. On the other side of the coin, He excludes those who have not been conformed to Christ in baptism. Knowing this, we have both the obligation and privilege to go to others with this message.

Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins, so now our slates are clean, if we have given our lives to Him. As those rescued by Christ from hopelessness, we hold in our hands the key to their eternal salvation. What is there not to share in such a blessing?

## Chapter 24

# God's Greatest of All Gifts

## Romans, Chapter 6

What was the greatest gift you ever received, physically speaking? For me, without any doubt, it was the gift of my wife Margie, with whom I have been married for 60 years. Secondary gifts were my Christian grandparents and parents, and especially my Dad, who instilled in me a heart for missions and teaching the Lord's Word. Other gifts were our six children and 13 grandchildren, my receiving a good college education through five degrees, most of them on generous scholarship aid. There was also the blessing of some special teachers along the way who encouraged me to develop my gifts. There were loyal friends, a loving church family and the gift we all share, God's marvelous creation.

And you? What are some of the special gifts you have received? Stop right here and list them. ... How many did you list?

## The Greatest Gift of All

Now, with that out of the way, let's talk about the greatest gift of all: God's glorious offering to us His Son, to die an inglorious death on our behalf. God in Heaven sent His precious Son to be born as a human being, in an humble feed trough. As a baby, he had to be taken quickly to Egypt, to escape King Herod's evil scheme. Yes, He was a baby. Therefore, He had to be nursed, changed and cared for when He fell and scraped a knee. Growing up in an humble home, He learned carpentry, Joseph's trade. When a man, He submitted to baptism, even though sinless, and then spent 40 days in fasting and prayer. While weak from that fast, Satan took advantage of Him, tempting Him with the only three cannons he has in his arsenal: Lust of the eye, lust of the flesh and the pride of life (Genesis 3, Matthew 3:1-11, Luke 4:1-13, 1 John 2:15-17). In Luke's account, it is noted that Satan had been temporarily when he left Jesus, but he was determined to return at an opportune time.

## Satan Never Gives Up

Old Lucifer never gives up, somewhat like today's terrorists. He bides his time, just waiting for a moment when we are weak, lusting after

things, proud of our accomplishments ... and then he strikes! I saw a segment on the Discovery Channel recently, in which lionesses, hoping to take down an elephant, knew they could never do it during the day. However, in the dead of night they had powerful night vision, while the elephants had poor night vision. They attacked one straggler at the end of the herd and, after a number of attempts, finally brought him down. Isn't that exactly the strategy of Satan? It didn't work against Jesus, but so often does against us.

## Jesus Both Loved and Hated

During Jesus' ministry He was both loved and hated. He was loved by the masses, who longed for both His healings and His becoming their military leader, to rid them of their hated Roman overlords. He was hated by the religious establishment, because He wasn't one of theirs. To them He was an uncredentialed country hick from Galilee who claimed sonship with God. In the musical, *The Music Man*, Professor Harold Hill was rejected by his fellow traveling salesmen because "he don't know the territory!" In other words, they considered him an unqualified shyster. They were more right than they realized.

Jesus was even more galling, He was drawing huge crowds to His teaching. So He had to go. Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees (all of the religious establishment) began plotting how to kill Him and they finally got their way by means of false witnesses. Roman Governor Pontius Pilate saw through their scheme, but gave in to their demands to have Jesus crucified, perhaps the most long-lasting and painful death ever devised. But before Jesus was nailed to the cross, He was thoroughly scourged. If you attended the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, you saw a graphic example of scourging. The accused person was beaten almost senseless.

## Dying As a Man, Not a God

Jesus died as a man, thirsty, in agony and feeling forsaken even by His Father. Instead of His death throes lingering for several days, He died within about six hours, not from the crucifixion, but from the burden of bearing all of the sins of all humankind on His own shoulders. He died of a broken heart, broken for us. And in His death He atoned, or paid the price, for our sins. From that time, all of us can receive forgiveness of our sins, if we believe in Him, confess Him, repent of our sins, dying to them,

and being buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:1-7).

## Blessings in Christ

But wait, that is not the end of the blessings received from Christ, God's gift to us. Paul tells us that if we have died with Christ, just as He was raised from the dead, we too will be raised on the Last Day, to live eternally with Him (Romans 6:8-10). We also receive His presence in our lives through His Spirit (Acts 2:38). We receive ongoing forgiveness (1 John 2:1-2). We have Jesus as our eternal Mediator, Intercessor and Advocate (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 7:23-25, 1 John 2:1). He is our great High Priest, who offered Himself as a final sacrifice for us (Hebrews 7:26).

What more could we possibly want? Yet some relegate Jesus to the level of just one of many prophets. Others make Him sort of a god, like Buddha. Still others make Him a prophet who would have a successor, in the words of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:17-19). Muhammad is believed by Muslims to have been that prophet. Joseph Smith is believed by Latter Day Saints to have been that prophet. Not so! God's revelation to Moses about another prophet like him is thoroughly proven in the New Testament to have been Jesus (Acts 3:22-26).

Beyond all of this are other blessings we have in Christ. He is the Light of the World, to guide us; the Bread and Water of Life, to sustain us; our Good Shepherd, to lead us; the Way, the Truth and the Life, to give us direction and spiritual energy; the Resurrection and the Life, to give us hope beyond the grave; The ruler over His kingdom; the Head of His body, the church; the Husband of His spiritual bride; and much more. The Book of John portrays His nature in many different ways.

## What to Do with God's Greatest Gift?

God's greatest gift! But what do we do with it? Do we leave it unopened? Do we return it to Sender? Do we ignore it? Do we half-heartedly accept it? Or do we receive it with open arms and hearts? If we do so, we can enjoy all of the blessings to be found in Him.

Here is another facet of our relationship to Jesus. Almost daily in our e-mail we find some generally inspiring message, with the plea not to let it die, but to pass it on. In like manner, the inspiring message of Jesus, God's incomparable gift to us, must not just die with us. It must be passed on, and especially to those who do not know about this gift.

## Chapter 25

# Sons of the Living God

## Romans 9:1-26

A famed atheist/scientist, Richard Dawkins, published a book called, *The God Delusion*, in which he argued that the existence of God is supremely improbable. Another scientist, Francis S. Collins, published a book titled, *The Language of God*, in which he claims that science alone isn't enough to answer all of the important questions about life and the universe about us.

Both are eminent scholars in their field, so which of the two is right? Is there a Supreme Intelligence who designed all of the universe, even calling the stars by name? Or, as Dawkins would have us believe, did everything in creation occur strictly by chance? Did this randomness of chance bring into being a mass of “dark energy” that evolved into living forms over eons of time, with no outside planning or guidance?

### Nature and Intelligent Organization

We don't need to refer to the Bible or professors of religion to convince us that there is a God in Heaven. Very complex nature itself, as Paul says in Romans 1, teaches us that there is organization and structure to all of creation. Furthermore, he tells us that the mind behind all of creation is God Himself. We don't really know anything about conditions before time began, except that the earth was in a chaotic state, void and without form. We cannot know from where God came. We cannot locate His home in Heaven. We have no address for Him. The first Russian astronaut into space, Yuri Gagarin, came back to earth and reported that he didn't see God anywhere. American astronauts reported that they saw God everywhere in His awe-inspiring cosmos.

We cannot know a lot about God, nor where His Heaven is. However, we can see that He is supremely patient with us, or we as humankind would have been wiped out long ago. We can know that He has provided all things for us, because, with all of our brilliance, we cannot produce life or even the basic building blocks behind all life.

## Does God Want All to Be Saved?

Furthermore, we can know that He does not will any human being to be separated from Him and eternally lost. A great cloud of witnesses to what He has done through Christ, our sacrificial Lamb and Savior, tells us that God loves us and wants us to dwell with Him eternally.

The prophet Hosea told us long ago,

“I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one.” (Hosea 2:23). Hosea also declared, “... they will be called ‘sons of the living God’” (Hosea 1:10).

Hosea was referring to those pagans who would turn to God and he was warning God’s people that their rebellion against Him would result in their being rejected, while those outside of that covenant family would be welcomed as new sons of God. So, rather than being merely evolved animals, even though some act like it, we have the divine right to be God’s sons and daughters. What more elevated position could anyone desire?

Today we see multitudes of people of all races and countless tongues confessing that they truly are God’s children. They have received this blessing because someone, somehow, turned to them with the Father’s invitation to join Him as a part of His family. Every day, in every way, the Lord calls ‘my people’ those who are former idolaters, former deniers of the deity of Jesus, former men and women of evil desires and behavior.

### Billions Still Not God’s People

Yet, there are billions of others who are not ‘my people,’ most often because they have never had the opportunity to learn that they can be, and how to go about their adoption into the Father’s family. That is where we, as His children, come in. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). If they perish, it is either because He has rejected them for their evil ways, or because we have not been concerned about their lostness.

We can make a difference because we are to be lights shining in a dark world (Philippians 2:15). May this be said of all of us who claim to be ambassadors for Jesus. What a blessing it is to be called children of the living God and what a double blessing it is to draw others into His family.

## Chapter 26

# How Can They Hear Without a Preacher?

### Romans 10:8-15

Once in Brazil we were traveling along a narrow dirt road in the interior, when we saw a man hitching a ride. We stopped and picked him up. As we continued on our way, I asked him, “Do you know Jesus?” His revealing answer was, “I’m not sure. Does he live around here?”

Was this a rare case? Not really. I have found many other people in Brazil and throughout the world who don’t know Jesus. Well, they may have heard the name, but they don’t know Him personally as Lord and Savior. It may not be their fault. They can’t know Jesus unless they have had an opportunity to hear about Him.

### Lost Need Help to Know Jesus

Paul tells us in Romans 1 that if we are ignorant of the existence of the Supreme Lord and Creator of the universe, we are to blame, for He has made Himself known through His creation. However, we cannot even begin to imagine Jesus Christ and the salvation found in Him without help. To know Him means to have been given an opportunity to hear, read or see on the media about Him. Billions of people on this planet do not know Jesus. For instance, the 1.2 billion Muslims know Him only as a prophet, rejecting His sonship and His sacrifice for our sins on the cross. The masses of people in India, China, Indonesia and other Eastern countries may know Him at best only as a sort of god like Buddha. No, the majority of Earth’s population does not really know Jesus, primarily because no one has taught this multitude about Him.

This is precisely Paul’s message in Romans 10. He asked, “How shall they call on Him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher?”

When he penned this, public or private proclamation of the story of Jesus was the only means by which the world could learn of, and turn to, Jesus. Later, written records of His life and deeds became available, but not yet in the days of Paul. He was diligent about proclaiming Christ



throughout the Roman world and urged his associates to do the same. He told Timothy,

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it ... Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim. 3:14-17, 4:2).

## Imposters Still Pervert the Word

Paul also reminded Timothy that evil men and imposters would go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13). Has anything changed? No, imposters still arise to pervert the Word of God. Charismatic figures arise to lead thousands after them. Sadly, in many cases, they turn out to be deceivers, hiding improper motives and behavior.

## Communication Possibilities Endless

Today, the means of proclaiming Christ, indeed of communication, are almost miraculous. During all of our 18 years in Brazil, there was no such thing as cell phones. Telephone communication was dicey in quality and very expensive, as far as international calls were concerned. Regular mail, even by air, was quite slow. We had no access to international TV programming.

My major purpose in that country was to prepare and distribute Christian publications. Just before we went there, one brother asked us why we were going, since he had heard that I was not really a preacher. Earlier I had preached regularly for eight years, but that didn't register on him. As it turned out, the Lord blessed me with an extensive publications ministry, which reached myriads of people in Brazil, Portugal and other Portuguese-speaking regions. I also preached and taught each week, but the publications program made my voice both national and international. The same thing can be said for J.C. Choate, whose publications over the decades have had an enormous impact on countless people in various languages.

## How Shall They Hear?

How shall they hear without a preacher? Now they can hear by way of TV, radio, dramas, the Internet, e-mail, CD and DVD, as well as

publications and oral proclamation. We found in Brazil that putting on mini-dramas at Bible camp sessions was an effective way of teaching children and youth Bible stories. One young man was drafted to play Jesus crucified and resurrected. He was so convicted by his acting role that he was baptized before the session was over. Our missionary in Quebec, Canada, Roger Saumur, is excellent at puppetry. He captures the attention of both children and adults by his puppet shows. If Paul were living today, I believe he would wholeheartedly utilize every possible means of communicating the Gospel — puppetry, radio, TV, the Internet, publications and any other way in which to spread knowledge of the Word.

Rather than abandoning the media to the filth that is daily presented on it, we should use it for the glory of the Lord and His Kingdom. However, there is still no substitute for personal teaching and preaching. A scientist recently discussed the deep-set urge in human hearts to explore, firsthand, new worlds. He explained that robots are roving on the surface of Mars, but astronauts still long to go there and set foot personally on that forbidding landscape. Despite all of the dangers involved in getting there and surviving while there, they still want to make the journey. In like manner, there is no substitute for going to where the multitudes live and communicating with them face-to-face.

## Still a Need for Face-to-Face Evangelism

Probably as long as the world remains, there will also be a need for personally going to other peoples with the story of salvation, rather than relying only on the media to accomplish this. If we cannot go personally to certain other lands, due to their denying our right to enter and teach, then we must rely on the media. It has been discovered that Bible courses on the Internet and on DVD disks can penetrate even the most closed of political borders. World English Institute reports that it has many students in countries that I had imagined could not be entered. Nations University reports that it has an impressive number of Iranian students in its Bible and Bible-related extension courses. But even with all of this, Paul was right. It is still better in the final analysis to go, and to send spiritual pioneers to every possible corner of the world.

Our goal is that “their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world” (Psalm 19:4). Our prayer is that God be found by those who did not ask for Him (Isaiah 65:1).

## Chapter 27

# Keep the Flame Alive!

### Romans 12:1-21

Wendell Broom, veteran missionary extraordinary, once observed, “The trouble with our living sacrifice is that about the time we get it on the altar, it starts crawling back off.” True! We who call ourselves Christians are not always very diligent about being the living sacrifice that our Lord expects us to be. Paul commands us,

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1).

Then Paul continues by warning us to be no longer conformed to the world, but transformed. A power transformer changes electric current from the powerful surge that it is in a line to a level that is compatible with household or industrial use. When traveling abroad it is often necessary to have in hand a transformer, to change the 220 volt current to 110 volts. Otherwise, our small appliances or computer will blow up with a shower of sparks. We are to be transformed; different from the world. Others should see our life and works, and glorify not us, but our God. Jesus tells us, “... let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

### Illustration on Letting our Light Shine

To illustrate, my wife and I were once in a tour group to China, at the invitation of the Chinese government. All of us were Christians and all with prior overseas experience. Our primary purpose was to research the different religions in that nation. Of course, we were assigned a guide, perhaps as much to monitor us as to guide us. Near the end of the tour we were on a train heading from Nanjing to Suchow. The guide was sitting by me. He turned to me and asked, “What makes you people different? You don’t drink or smoke. You don’t go to the night clubs. You are quiet and respectful.” What a door of opportunity opened to me! I spent some little time explaining what it means to be genuine Christian. At a closing banquet sponsored by the Chinese government, he introduced us by explaining, “We are all Christians.”

I don't know whether he was or not, but at least, he was influenced by our example. This is what is meant by living a transformed life.

Paul continues his theme of a sacrificial, transformed life by adding, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep you spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:9-11).

### **Keep Holy Flame Burning**

There is no place in our life or mission to say, "Ho hum" or "Yeah, right!" The priests under the Law of Moses were to keep a holy flame burning before the Lord and were to use only sanctified fire for the altar of incense. Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu learned that the use of unauthorized fire was a deadly act. Surely they rationalized that "fire is fire, after all," but it wasn't and they were consumed by fire from the Lord. Our God is holy, so we must approach Him in all reverence.

We must also maintain our flame of devotion, dedication and example always burning brightly. The Olympic flame is lit once every four years in Olympia, Greece, by concentrating the sun's rays onto a set of mirrors until a flame appears on the designated "altar." An Olympic torch is lit from it and is relayed through many countries until it reaches the stadium of that year's Olympics, where a great torch is lit from it. This is a hallowed tradition which began with the first modern Olympics in 1896, reproducing the ancient Greek practice of lighting a sacred fire before Olympic games of that day.

### **Flame of Passion Relayed to All Lands**

In like manner, the flame of Christian preaching and passion must be relayed to all nations in all generations. My as-yet-unpublished novel, *Centauri 3*, looks to the distant future when the light of Christian faith will have been nearly extinguished. It tells the story of one faithful young follower of the Light who is sent to a far world which lies in total spiritual darkness. Jesus once asked, "... when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). He will, only if we of each generation raise the torch of faith high and then pass it on intact to the next generation.

## Chapter 28

# Every Tongue Will Confess to God

### Romans 14:1-12

A brother who had drifted far from God over the years recently came back to the faith. In his public confession he stated, “I am the world’s worst sinner.” His words echoed those of the Apostle Paul,

“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9).

He also confessed in Galatians 1:13 that he had tried to destroy the church. He explained in Acts 22:4-5 and 26:9-11 just how far he had gone in attempting to stamp out the Christian faith. Yet, at his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, he realized the enormity of his error, so he confessed the very Christ he had persecuted and was soon baptized.

Paul was honestly mistaken, so when he saw how far off the mark he was, he repented and turned to Christ with all of his being. The prodigal son in Luke 15 was also far off the mark, but when he finally came to himself, he repented and returned to his father, who received him with open arms and a celebration.

### Many Are Honestly Mistaken About Jesus

People today by the billions are honestly mistaken in their view of Jesus. The Muslims, for instance, insist that He cannot be God’s son, “for it does not behoove Allah to have a son.” Nor, to Muslims, can He be God’s sacrificed lamb, for they deny His death and resurrection. In these denials they have cut themselves off entirely from salvation. Yet, they believe, even fanatically, that their position is correct and that of Christians is blasphemous against Allah. They are honestly mistaken, as was Paul before his conversion.

Then there are the multitudes who follow the Hindu or Buddhist faith, or any one of countless other religious persuasions. There are also those in the Jewish and Christian faiths who are mistaken about essential points of doctrine. They, too, are honestly mistaken. Honestly mistaken or not, Paul tells us that we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. He then

quotes Isaiah 45:23:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’”

## Answering to God for Our Lives

Paul’s conclusion is that each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Again, Paul says that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We all sin, oh how we sin! A man I worked with in a publishing plant many years ago argued that he had never sinned. Exasperated, I finally told him, “You just sinned in claiming that you have never sinned.” The word “sin” is no longer politically or socially correct. D.H. Lawrence once wrote, “There is nothing so artificial as sinning nowadays. I suppose it once was real” (from his novel, *St. Maur*). No matter how we dissect it, sin is still sin, and every human must answer to God for it.

Since we are all in the same boat, and one that can sink with the weight of unforgiven sin, we should exercise the most care in how we behave and how we treat others, even how we talk about them. We should be prompt to share with them, in the kindest way possible, our faith, but reminding them that they too, along with us, will answer to the Supreme Judge of the universe for how they played out their years on earth.

There is a song we used to sing,

“You never mentioned Him to me;  
You helped me not the light to see.  
You saw me day by day,  
And knew I was astray,  
But never mentioned Him to me.”

What an indictment! I confess to having failed in this regard, time and time again. Perhaps I concluded unconsciously that the particular person in question would not be receptive to my words about Jesus. Or perhaps I just didn’t take the time to cultivate a friendship with that person, so as to eventually discuss his or her life in the light of eternal judgment.

## How Will I Answer?

How will I answer to God for the many people who have come into

my life and then perhaps have left it, without ever hearing a word from me about salvation issues? How will I answer for these lapses? How will you answer? Paul said that he was obligated “both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish” (Romans 1:14). We have no less an obligation worldwide. We are in the debt of every person, of every nation, city, tribe and clan, to warn him or her of Judgment Day and how to prepare for it.

## Chapter 29

# God's Ambassadors

### 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2

Once in a restaurant in Istanbul, Turkey, I witnessed a well-dressed Muslim man drinking wine. When I asked my host about his doing so, since alcohol in all of its forms is prohibited in the Qur'an, he answered, "He is the ambassador of a neighboring country and lives above the rules that govern the rest of us." Would you consider him a good ambassador, either for his nation or for Islam?

Ambassadors should always be exemplary representatives of their own country, which is often judged by the ambassador's personal behavior. In fact, ambassadors **are** their country, for all practical purposes. They should therefore be the best possible representatives of their governments, because everyone is watching them. Unfortunately, as in the case of the ambassador in Istanbul, some do not live up to the high standards that should govern their way of living and dealing with other people.

### Ambassadors for Christ

Paul says that Christians are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). We represent our Lord in all aspects of our life. We are under constant surveillance by the world, to see whether or not we live up to the standards our Lord has set for us. The meaning of Christian is, in one sense, "little Christs" or "Christ-ones." British politician Edmund Burke once wrote,

"Example is the school of mankind, and they will learn at no other" (*Letters on a Regicide Peace*, Letter 1).

An unknown author wrote a poem called, "*The Gospel According to Me*." The only Gospel many will ever read is the one they see in our faces, our attitudes and our actions. When others see us misbehaving, not controlling our emotions, showing anger or spite, divorcing, engaging in pornography, dabbling in drugs and alcohol or otherwise besmirching our Christian act, they generally are disgusted with us and reject our message. This is especially true for elders, ministers, deacons, Bible teachers, missionaries and others in public Christian service, when their example is



a betrayal of Christianity. We have seen cases of marital infidelity and divorce even on the mission field. These hurt both the people involved and the work we were attempting to accomplish. We have known of other spiritual and moral lapses that were no less deadly.

These things ought not ever to happen, for we are ambassadors of Christ, transmitting to the lost our Lord's message of reconciliation. Of course, we are not perfect and should be prompt to confess our failures, but at the same time, we have an especially high and noble standard to follow.

## What a Glorious Calling!

What a glorious calling is ours! God is making His appeal through us "jars of clay" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Our task is to implore others to be reconciled to God, through our sinless Savior, who was made sin for all of humanity, that in Him we might become righteous. Let us lift high the banner of our ambassadorship, for there is no greater position that we can hold in this world.

## Chapter 30

# No Other Gospel

### Galatians 1:6-24

As I drive the streets of our greater Oklahoma City area, I continue to be amazed at the number of different kinds of religions represented here. There are Muslim mosques, Buddhist temples, Baha'i centers, Hin-du establishments, Japanese and Chinese religious groups, spiritist "tents", fortune tellers and a host of others. Then there is Christendom. Jesus prayed that all of His disciples be one (John 17:20-21). Yet, in our metropolitan region alone there are hundreds of different faiths and sects. Some preach a relatively biblical message, while others, such as the Unitarian-Universalist, present a message that is far from New Testament teaching in many respects.

### A Fractured Faith

No religious movement in all of history has been fractured as much as the Christian faith. Some 30,000 divisions have come about within Christendom. What has happened? Honest differences have divided some, while in the case of others, it appears that the proverb, "*When the tide is out, every little shrimp has his own pond,*" may fit. Independent churches proliferate, each with a strong charismatic leader or, often these days, a husband-wife pastoral team.

With all of this division, how can the Christian faith present a unified voice to an unbelieving world? As things now stand, it cannot. I have been told on the mission field, "Get your message together, and then I may listen."

### The Only Basis for Unity

The only basis for Christian unity is a return to the pure Gospel proclaimed by Christ and the apostles in the first century. That is the only valid message that we can share with the world. Paul warns us in Galatians 1:6-8:

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of God and are turning to a different gospel — which is

really no gospel at all ... But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.”

## Doctrine and Tradition Mixed Up

It isn't at all easy to return to the simple Gospel of Christ. Why? Partially because we carry so much baggage of tradition and custom that we have difficulty distinguishing between the true Gospel and human tradition. An insight on this subject goes as follows:

*What begins as an expediency eventually becomes a habit, then a standard practice and finally a sacred tradition that is set in stone. Then, woe be to the person who attempts to move that stone!”*

Our religious traditions become so much a part of our mentality that we unconsciously transmit them to others. When we went to Brazil, our mission team determined that it would shed purely American ways of doing our work and worship. In so doing, we could begin again with New Testament methods, adapted in part to Brazilian ways of doing things. But without even realizing it, we introduced some of our American ways.

I didn't realize how much until I returned there later with a campaign team. One of the older converts approached me after a service, agitated. He said, “Brother, since you left, sometimes the one directing the communion service doesn't lead a prayer before the offering.” “Oh, oh!” I said to myself. Then I answered him, “I appreciate your concern, but actually, there is no biblical command to offer a prayer before the contribution. In fact, taking up a collection each Lord's Day during the worship is an expedient and not a command.”

For awhile we tried in Brazil to have a collection box at the main doors, so that people could contribute either when entering or when leaving. Guess what? Contributions diminished dramatically, so we had to go back to passing a collection plate.

## No Set Pattern for Taking Church Collections

We are told to lay by in store on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2), but no mention is made of doing this during a worship hour. I'm afraid I left my Brazilian brother confused, and left myself concerned, about how many other Americanisms we had introduced without wanting to do so. Our preaching and teaching to other peoples should be the Gospel and

all that is related to it. Our way of doing things in other nations should take on the character of those nations. We found in our overseas work that the clock might as well be thrown out. Those attending service had to come, in most cases, by public transportation, which on Sundays is diminished in frequency. As a result, many arrived 15, 20 or 30 minutes late. So we would begin 15 minutes late and serve the Lord's Supper after the preaching, so that all would be present by then to partake of it. There was also the matter of a more casual Brazilian attitude toward punctuality. Once our national members arrived for services, they wanted it to be worth their while, so worship might go on for an hour-and-a-half or even two hours. All of that was tough on us by-the-clock Americans, but we had to learn to adjust to it.

This was an example of adapting to the local situation in our scheduling, but at the same time, being careful to present the message of Christ as clearly as possible in the locals' language and cultural framework. This meant using illustrations from their history and experience, not necessarily ours. One visiting Stateside minister preached about the waving fields of wheat in Kansas. No one there had a clue as to his imagery, so as I translated him, I talked about growing rice in Brazil, something they could understand.

## Only One Gospel

No other gospel! Jesus' parting words to His messengers was to "preach the Gospel to every creature." Paul preached Christ and Him crucified. Yet on church sign boards and in newspaper ads, we read all kinds of subjects announced as sermon topics. Let us all rededicate our efforts to proclaim the pure message of Christ, rather than our opinions or the latest political or social concern.

## Chapter 31

# A Basket Full of Blessings

## Ephesians 1:3-14

I'm sitting here looking out my study window at the spring flowers and our plum tree loaded with little plums. If I walk out the front door, there are three trees, riotous in their spring display. Our lawn is lush, due to extraordinary amounts of rain this season. Our flower beds are colorful. Our little clematis vine, loaded with magnificent purple blossoms, almost covers the mail box out front. The sky is intensely blue, with a handful of fleecy white cumulous clouds drifting by. What blessings there are in everyday living, if we will just stop long enough to "stop and smell the roses!"

### Our Daily Blessings

And what blessings there are for us living in the United States! Jay Leno is reported to have observed, uncharacteristically serious:

"The other day I was reading Newsweek and came across some poll data I found rather hard to believe. The poll alleges that 67 percent of Americans are unhappy with the direction the country is headed. In essence, two-thirds of the citizenry just ain't happy and want a change. So being the knuckle dragger I am, I started thinking, 'What are we so unhappy about? Is it that we have electricity and running water 24 hours a day, 7 days a week? Is our unhappiness the result of having air conditioning in the summer and heating in the winter? Could it be that 95.4 percent of these unhappy folks have a job? Maybe it is the ability to walk into a grocery store at any time and see more food in moments than Darfur has seen in the last year? Maybe it is the ability to drive from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean without having to present identification papers as we move through each state? Or possibly the hundreds of clean and safe motels we find along the way that can provide temporary shelter? I guess having thousands of restaurants with varying cuisines

from around the world is just not good enough. Or could it be that when we wreck our car, emergency workers show up and provide services to help and even send a helicopter to take you to the hospital.

“Perhaps you are one of the 70 percent of Americans who own a home. You may be upset with knowing that in the unfortunate case of a fire, a group of trained firefighters will appear in moments and use top notch equipment to extinguish the flames, thus saving you, your family and your belongings. Or if, while at home watching one of your many flat screen TVs, a burglar or prowler intrudes, an officer equipped with a gun and a bullet-proof vest will come to defend you and your family against attack or loss. This, all in the backdrop of neighborhoods free of bombs or militias raping and pillaging the residents. Neighborhoods where 90 percent of teenagers own cell phones and computers. How about the complete religious, social and political freedoms we enjoy that are the envy of everyone in the world? Maybe that is what has 67 percent of you folks unhappy. ...

“No wonder the world loves the U.S., yet has a great disdain for its citizens. They see us for what we are: the most blessed people in the world who do nothing but complain about what we don’t have, and what we hate about the country, instead of thanking the good Lord we live here. ...”

## Greatest of all blessings

Yes, thank the Good Lord we live here. But that is far from all of the blessings the Lord has dropped into our basket. Let’s ponder the spiritual blessings He has provided. He gave us a Book just full and running over with the best kind of rules by which to live. He gave us, above all, His Son, to walk in our shoes here on our earth, to be sorely tempted, to be misunderstood, to hunger, thirst, suffer tiredness, rejection, disappointment, intense criticism, betrayal, trumped-up charges, a whipping that almost killed Him and a morbidly cruel execution. The Lord then raised His Son from the dead, showed Him to more than 500 witnesses, promised through Him forgiveness of sins, a new birth, the presence of His Spirit in our lives, a new spiritual family — the church — and the hope of an eternity with Him. What more could we possibly want? Our basket is

full and running over, or as Paul says,

“Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

## How Do We Use our Blessings?

How do we use our basket full of blessings? Are we like the proverbial “dog in the manger,” neither eating the hay nor allowing the cattle to eat it? Or are we like Paul, whose life was devoted to sharing his spiritual blessings in Christ? If our blessings are shared, they will multiply for our good, the good of those who receive them, and the good of Christ’s cause around the world. Have you ever noticed how food spoils eventually, even in a refrigerator? Even so, our basket of spiritual blessings will spoil if not shared. “What’s mine is yours, and I will share it if I can” should be our constant attitude.

## Chapter 32

# Unlocking the Mystery of Christ

## Ephesians 3:2-12

Passwords are the key to unlocking all kinds of documents. I have so many different passwords or secret numbers that I have to stop and think which is which. Then, on occasion I bump into a mental block and have to ask for help to remember that particular document opener. Without it there is no way in which to open it — that is, unless a hacker or identity thief is at work on the document.

In the case of doors, files, post office boxes, safe deposit boxes, cars and a host of other secure objects, a key is necessary to gaining access to them. It was a glorious day for us when we finally bought a newer-model used car that had a remote door opener and locker; a trunk opener and a theft alarm. Its functioning is about as mysterious to me as that of our remote garage-door opener, but I love it.

As we all know, keys are quite important, but may be lost, and then we're in deep mud. I know. I have lost more than one set of keys over the years. It is most frustrating to be denied access to a locked item because the key was no longer available.

### God's Locked-up Mystery

Paul refers in Ephesians 3 to the mystery of Christ, which had remained locked up until the launching of the Christian Age. No one in all of history before that time had the password or key necessary to unlocking this mystery of Christ. Not even the ancient patriarchs, prophets or the angels of God could comprehend this mystery. Not even the angels? According to 1 Peter 1:10-12, they too longed to look into this mystery, but could not.

Paul says that the mystery was revealed first to God's appointed messengers in New Testament times. What is this great mystery that had been locked up for so long? It is this: through the Gospel "the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:6).

That's it! Mutual enemies could become not just friends, but broth-



ers and sisters in the same spiritual family. The unsearchable riches of Christ could be shared equally with all races and peoples.

## The Wisdom of God Revealed Through the Church

Further, Paul reveals that now, through the Church, the all-encompassing wisdom of God was to be made known, not only to Jews and Gentiles, but also to rulers and authorities. The Church, a very human body, but also the outward manifestation of Christ, was to be entrusted with unlocking and explaining this mystery. No other plan was to be offered; no other mystery was to be revealed.

There is no later gospel or scripture; no new holy message; no golden plates. This was the message once for all delivered or entrusted to the saints (Jude 3). From that time onward, through faith all of us can approach God, not through a Holy Place, a Most Holy Place, or any other sanctuary, but individually, with freedom and confidence.

We in the Church hold the key, then. Few outside of Christ can or will, without help, understand the nature of Christ and His Church. Few can fathom the depths of His love for us. Few can appreciate the love He has for His Church. Few can see the holiness of the Church. Few can understand the driving force that impels the Church forward in her mission to unlock the mystery of Christ in such a way that others can understand and appropriate its blessings. Is the Church vitally important? Of course — far more important to the Lord’s eternal plan than we sometimes realize.

## We Hold the Key

“How can I [understand] unless someone explains it to me?” were the words of the Ethiopian official to the evangelist Philip (Acts 8:31). Will the world ever come to understand? We hold the key. When will we awaken to the amazing trust Christ has placed in us? When we are given a key to a business place, government office, church building, school or other facility, this indicates that we are expected to judiciously use it and never loan it out to an unauthorized person or even worse, lose it. I recently lost a set of keys, some of them important. I’m embarrassed about the loss, even though I certainly didn’t intend to lose those keys. “Use it or lose it” is a proverb that fits here. We either use the key the Lord has given us to unlock His message for others or we lose it for lack of use. Do we still have the key in our hand or have we lost it?

## Chapter 33

# Shining Like Stars in the Universe

### Philippians 2:5-16

We live in a large metropolitan area which continues to multiply in size and, for the most part, in quality. But there are downsides to this growth: serious traffic congestion, for one. For another, even on a clear night we can see few stars. Venus and Jupiter are visible, along with Mars and sometimes Saturn. Orion is generally easy to make out. Beyond these shining lights, few others can be seen. Why? City lights, haze and many tall trees hide God's great lights from us.

When we were recently at our son's house in the mountains of northern California, I would slip out onto his wrap-around veranda and take in the marvelous display overhead. Why, there were the big and little dippers and so many other constellations! I hadn't realized how very much I missed the brilliant night sky. In Brazil, being in the southern hemisphere, the night sky, especially in the winter, is glorious. At our Bible camp in the mountains, I would turn off the outdoor lights at 10 P.M. Then I would lie down on the grass and just soak up the stars, so bright that they appeared to be holes punched in the velvety heavens, letting the brilliance of God's glory show through. Especially striking were the Milky Way, the Southern Cross and the two Magellenic Clouds. As I gazed in wonder at the display, I recalled the words of David:

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him” (Psalm 8:3-4).

What is even more amazing is that our Creator God determines the number of stars and calls each one by name (Psalm 147:4). When this psalm was created, the poet could only see at best a few thousand stars. Now we know that there are some 400 million known galaxies, each made up of millions of stars! And astronomers confess that they have no idea as to just how much more there is out there. Yet our God knows them all by name. Incredible!

## God Knows Us and Calls Us Stars

Even more incredible is the fact that He knows us by name and calls us His stars (Philippians 2:15). Can you imagine that? We are His stars, as we hold out the Word of Life to others.

Does anyone doubt that we live in a crooked and perverse generation, as Paul said it in that same verse? So many people about us have bought into the idea that “what’s yours is mine, and I will take it if I can.” This is the mentality of entitlement. It is the attitude that says, “I deserve what you have. Therefore, I have every right to take it from you.” This is what lies behind rapes, robberies, identity thefts, scams, extortions, lies, false testimonies, inflated lawsuits, hatred and sometimes even murders. Misuse of sex, alcohol and drug addiction, abuse of mates and children, cheating on one’s mate ... The list could go on and on. Yes, we do live in a crooked, depraved and violent age.

Yet, Paul says that we are to shine like the stars in Heaven, shedding light on all of the dark places of this earth. That doesn’t mean that we are perfect, because no one is, but it does mean that we are to set a standard of excellence for others to follow. They should be able to see the light of Christ shining in us and glorify God for us.

## Others Marveled at Christians’ Love

Roman authorities marveled at how Christians loved one another. The normal way of life was to do the other person in before he could do you in. The normal way was to take revenge on anyone who crossed you, your family or friends. *Lex talonis* — an eye for an eye. In fact, two eyes for an eye. The normal way was lust. The normal way was orgies. The normal way was bloody gladiatorial contests to the death. Yet, here came along Christians who sought no revenge, who did not cheat or defraud, who were truthful and caring, who loved in an *agape* fashion, seeking no gain for self. No wonder others marveled at them. Even at the moment of their martyrdom they begged God to forgive their executioners. They were lights shining in a depraved generation.

## Bright Stars Needed

If ever we needed stars today to shine in our depraved world, it is now. Paul says in Romans 13:12, “ ... let us put aside the deeds of darkness and

put on the armor of light.” Adlai Stevenson eulogized Eleanor Roosevelt in a speech before the UN, observing that “She would rather light candles than curse the darkness, and her glow has warmed the world.”

We have much higher candlepower than mere candles. We have the Light of the World illuminating us, so we can truly reflect that light and warm the world (Matt. 5:14, Jn. 8:12). Lighthouses have tremendously powerful light, because the source of light is reflected back and forth by way of mirrors, until their light is multiplied. Many astronomy telescopes use this same principle. We have no light of ourselves, but how we can reflect our Lord’s light and magnify it in the hearts of others!

## Chapter 34

# Mainspring of the Universe Proclaimed

### Colossians 1:9-23

I grew up on Superman, hoarding the comic books that featured him and dreaming that I could someday do some of the marvelous things he did. Since then I have discovered that there are no supermen here on earth. Every great “hero” has some weaknesses in his makeup. If you don’t believe it, just watch a presidential race. Not a single candidate has a perfect history. The opposition knows this and viciously jabs at the real or imagined mistakes made by a candidate. Anyone wishing to run for high office must be willing to be crucified in the process.

Of course, we need to be careful to have all of the facts before we condemn someone, whether “hero” or just an ordinary person. We must keep in mind the principle, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” Jesus told some self-righteous judges, “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7). Well, that leaves us in a pickle, because Paul tells us, “There is none righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10).

### Is There Really a Superman?

So then, is there no truly righteous person? Is there no Superman? Yes, there is, and he doesn’t leap tall buildings or fly around with a cape. He is found in the pages of the New Testament, and is especially well described in Colossians 1:15-20. In this beautiful passage Paul says that Jesus is:

**The image of the invisible God.** When Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the father and that will be enough for us” (John 14:8), Jesus answered him, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). While here with us, Jesus was God in the flesh. He bore and bears the eternal DNA of His Father.

**The firstborn over all creation.** By Him all things were created. Paul lists some of these created entities: Things in both Heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, powers, rulers or authorities. Everything was created by Him and for Him — everything! This includes

the remotest galaxies, the solar system, our earth and moon, every plant and animal, every human and all who hold positions of authority.

**Before all things.** He is eternally pre-existent. That is, He existed before there was a universe.

**The mainspring controlling all created things,** from the farthest galaxies to the tiniest sub-microscopic life. In Him, says Paul, all things hold together. He keeps the earth on its proper axis, rotation and orbit. If it varied even slightly from its God-ordained path, life would be extinguished.

**The head of His body, the church.** It has no other head, neither pope nor bishop, neither president nor council. The church belongs solely to Him. He is the one who purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The church follows only Him as her Shepherd.

**The beginning and firstborn from the dead,** so that in everything He might have the supremacy. There is no other supreme leader over the church or even over all of humanity. His resurrection attests to His power and authority.

**All of God's fullness dwells in Christ.** Through Christ God has reconciled all things to Himself. How did He accomplish this? By making peace with humanity through the blood of Christ shed on the cross. It is all about blood — not just any blood, but that of the one perfect man who died on the cross on our behalf.

## Reconciled to God Through Christ

Our great Father has reconciled us to Himself by Christ's physical body, presenting us in His sight as those free from blemish and from all accusation.

In today's terms, our rap sheet is perfectly clean. Cleansed by Christ, it is as if we had never committed any wrong. Think about it! All who turn to the Savior and obey His instructions are born into a new life and new family. God is then truly our Father, as long, Paul says, as we remain established and firm in our faith, not moved about here and there by every religious fad that comes along. Our hope must be centered on Christ and His Gospel.

## A Universal Message

But there is more, as TV advertisers constantly say. This is the Gospel the apostles preached. It had already been preached, near the end

of Paul's life, to "every creature under heaven." The Christian message is universal. Its wide circulation, even then, was proof of its universality.

It is still the same Gospel and is still universal. Our calling is to share it with every possible person in every possible location on our planet. Progress is being made, but we have a long way to go in fully realizing this calling.

## Chapter 35

# The Message Rang Out from You!

## 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

I never cease to be amazed at the speed of information transmission these days. While we were in Brazil from 1967 to 1985, communication with home was quite slow. Surface mail took weeks. Airmail took days, if not weeks. Phone calls were difficult because of generally poor connections. Now e-mail provides almost instant communication. And now two people a world apart can converse audibly through their computers! We are in close touch with missionaries in Brazil, Singapore, Canada, Africa ... Even telephone service is generally reliable, with not too many dropped calls. Recently a group of us conducted a conference call with a missionary family in Nicaragua, something impossible even a few years back.

Instant communication, however, can be harmful, as well as helpful. False rumors and wrong information can circle the globe literally in seconds. One statement, even made confidentially by a political leader, is on the Internet and in other international media within moments. We give great encouragement and vital information to our enemies, in our compulsion to reveal all. Media news people are especially guilty of this.

## The Speed of Bad News

It is sad that good news doesn't seem to travel as rapidly as bad news. We as a nation have much good to share with the world, but it is generally drowned out by the negative or the sordid. The only image many other people see and hear of our nation is distorted. One example will serve: In a quote from Islamic media, we as a people were called "cross-worshippers, polytheistic, weak-willed, grossly immoral and inferior in every way to Muslims." We can see where they get this view of us — from our media, which has a tendency to play up the negative, immoral and sensational, rather than the positive. The Internet is a powerful force throughout the entire world, but it is so often used as a vehicle for pornography, sexual gratification and other evils.

## The World's Greatest News



We as Christians have the world's greatest news to spread worldwide — wonderful good news to share. Yet it is so often obscured by our many divisions and the immoral behavior of some church leaders. We have the only message of hope available to our lost world. It should and must be ringing out to all of humankind. We have the tools with which to do this. We have TV, radio, the Internet, e-mail, cell phones, CD and DVD, extension and correspondence courses, literature and so many other means for dissemination of the Gospel. Individuals in Communist and Muslim lands, for instance, are receiving God's Good News on disk, when more common means of teaching are blocked.

Getting the saving message of Christ out to the world is nothing new, however. Paul commended the church in Thessalonica in these words:

“... you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you to not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thessalonians 1:7,8).

It was no accident that the Lord's message spread so far afield from Thessalonica. They had turned from idols to the living God. Their service had been produced by faith, their labor had been produced out of love and their endurance had been inspired by hope. They had become imitators of Paul and of the Lord. In spite of severe suffering they had welcomed the Spirit-inspired message with joy. And as we see elsewhere in Paul's letters, they gave generously to Paul's ministry and to the needs of others (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

## A Great Testimonial

What a testimonial! It is no wonder that the message of hope rang out from Thessalonica to Macedonia and the Roman world. Their example spoke volumes and we can infer that they also shared their joy in Christ with those about them.

Early Christians preached the Word wherever they went (Acts 8:4). Luke tells us that “all Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). This is the process intended by our Lord when He gave His Great Commission. All of humanity was to hear the life-saving message.

## Under the Same Mandate Today

Today we are under the same mandate as they. All of humanity is to hear the Word of God. How well are we doing with this noble assign-

ment? Great strides have been made in sub-Sahara Africa, India and Latin America. More modest strides have been made in Europe and much of Asia. Only the tiniest of footsteps have been taken in the more than 50 Muslim countries. China remains largely unreached. Countless tribes have yet to be entered.

The message is ringing out, but its sound is inconsistent and in some places muted. With all of the media outlets we have available today, why should it not ring out again as it did from Thessalonica?

## Chapter 36

# In Season and Out of Season

## 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5

My two favorite seasons are spring and fall — spring, when the life cycle of plants and trees begins anew as they put on their spring dress of beautiful flowers, and fall, when the trees get dressed up in such gorgeous raiment! Summer can be too hot at times and winter too cold. So for me, “in season” are the two transition seasons and “out of season” are the two extreme seasons. It is tough to work in the chill that is winter and in the intense heat that is summer. However, life and work must go on, regardless of the season.

Since we live in Tornado Alley here in Oklahoma and we’re in tornado season, TV weathermen remind us daily to have on hand survival gear for tornadoes. We pretty much ignore these instructions, so are not really prepared for the season. Moreover, they tell us to seek out a safe room when the sirens sound. The only one we have that could be called safe is a small coat closet in the center of our house, but it is packed with coats, boots, suitcases and other items, including my violin. Oh, well. If necessary, we dump most of it out into the hall and make room for two bodies.

### Prepared in Season and Out of Season

We need to learn a lesson from Paul. He wasn’t talking about tornadoes or Nor’easters, hurricanes, earthquakes or floods when he told Timothy to be prepared in season and out of season. He was talking about preaching the Word, correcting, rebuking and encouraging with patience and careful instruction. Timothy was to be ready daily, to keep his head in all situations, to endure hardship, to do the work of an evangelist and to discharge his ministerial duties.

How could he possibly do all this? For one thing, he had Paul’s example, along with that of his faithful mother and grandmother. He had been brought up from infancy on God’s Word — not a bad course of study. His mother and grandmother had seen to that, in spite of his having possibly a non-believing Greek father. Paul laid on Timothy the solemn obligation

to continue in the things he had learned from his family.

How many godly parents have seen some of their children turn their backs on the faith! King Hezekiah was a diligent servant of God, but his son Manasses was evil through and through. Today, how many children of faithful parents ignore sound doctrine and pursue paths that lead in questionable or even heretical directions. Even missionaries are not exempt from losing their way. Some, disappointed in their fellow Christians and/or their Christian heritage, leave the faith and turn to strange doctrines. Others leave the faith because of a messy divorce or immoral conduct. Some leave because of a misunderstanding or division that fractures the body. Whatever their justification for leaving, in so doing they give a terrible black eye to the cause they had espoused. It is difficult to measure the ripple effects in the church and community from their behavior and their abandoning their Christian family.

## How to Remain Committed

How could Timothy remain steadfast in season and out of season? How could he remain committed in the face of persecution? How, indeed? He not only had the Scriptures to follow, but also the example of Paul, who had suffered and was still suffering untold hardships as an apostle. For the most part today we have it easy as Christian servants. We receive at least a fairly reasonable salary. We live in a comfortable if not luxurious home. We have sufficient food and perhaps too much of it. We have a vehicle or two.

## Life Is Much Easier Than for Our Forebears

Even on the mission field, we have it much better than our predecessors. J.M. McCaleb, pioneer missionary to Japan, received so little in-come that he had to supplement it by teaching English at five cents an hour. A nickel an hour! He and his family were so destitute that they couldn't afford more coal for their furnace in the cold wintertime. As he scraped up the last coal dust from the cellar floor, the mailman brought a check from the U.S. that was totally unexpected. In season and out of season McCaleb served in a resistant field and, as World War II got under way, he and his family were summarily expelled from the country as "undesirable enemies."

## Preparation Is More Important Than Ever

Timothy was to be prepared to preach and teach. Preparation has never been more important than now, when our faith is being questioned and attacked from every side. We must be ready at all times to give a reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15).

This is true for every Christian, but especially true for elders, ministers, teachers and missionaries. Clarity of instruction is absolutely necessary on the mission field, because at best, we are often teaching in someone else's language and culture. While we strive to make our teaching culturally relevant, we have no right to water down or alter the doctrine of Christ and the apostles. Paul taught with a different kind of emphasis among scholars in Athens than he did with Jews in their synagogues, yet his teaching was true in each case to the Lord's intent.

Finally, Timothy was reminded that Scripture is the source for all Christian teaching. Paul said that all Scripture (including the Old Testament) is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. Only by going back continually to the fountain of truth can we become thoroughly equipped for every good work.

## Chapter 37

# Declare His Praises

## 1 Peter 2:9-12

When a child, I was always the smallest and skinniest guy in my class. Guess where that put me in the selection of athletic teams? Right. I was generally the last to be chosen and the last to be called into a game. The bench and I got well acquainted.

That is hard on the male of the species. However, I found that my slimness made me ideal for running. Finally, in college I rose to the top in track, being the No. 1 miler and sometimes the top two-miler in my college and league. I was also tagged to run on several relay teams. That helped heal my bruised ego. In later years in Brazil and here in the U.S. I ran the 5K, 10K and half-marathon, winning many trophies and medals. Finally, I was wanted and chosen.

## Chosen to Be a Priest

Actually, at age 13, I was chosen to be a priest belonging to God. That was a memorable day; the day when I gave myself to the Lord in baptism. My subsequent life has had its roller-coaster rides, times of spiritual victory and times of spiritual defeat. But the Lord has continued to call me out of the darkness of my sins and weaknesses into His wonderful light. His mercy has covered me time and time again. For all of these decades since my baptism I have been a member of His great family, a royal priest, a citizen of His holy nation, an individual belonging to God. What a marvelous honor! No other position on earth can compare to this one.

And if you are a faithful Christian, you too have all of these privileges of citizenship. We enjoy His mercy and salvation, but we are never to hoard it. Rather, we are to declare His praises to the world.

## Surrounded by the World

We are in the world. It surrounds us daily with all of its beauty and filth, its grace and violence, its peace and war. Yet we are to be aliens and strangers on this earth. We don't fit into the world's agenda. If we

try to, we just make ourselves look inconsistent and hypocritical. We are to live such good lives, says Peter, that the pagans out there may attempt to drag us down to their level, but in the end may eventually see our good works and glorify God.

To illustrate, for a period of time I was a staff artist for Dow Chemical Company. Out of the nine or so people in the art department, only two of us had any Christian convictions. We were laughed at and put into various dilemmas over our faith. Yet, when I left there, I was honored by the group and was presented with a valuable rare book. So my Christian influence apparently was greater than I had imagined.

## How to Show the Spirit?

How do we show the presence of Christ's Spirit in our lives? We study His word, pray and seek each day to live as our Lord would have lived while here with us. We demonstrate His living in us. Of course, this is easier said than done. He lives in the temple of our bodies and minds, but sometimes we act as if He were an absentee guest. We act as if some other spirit were motivating us. Paul tells us from his own experience,

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do” (Romans 7:15).

## Failure to Show Christ

There, friends, go all of us. Recently, I was a couple of people back at a checkout counter at the grocery. A lady at the front of the line had her sizeable stock of groceries entered and then handed the clerk a check. When she was asked for I.D., she said she had nothing with her, not even her driver's license. She said she would be just a minute. Much later she returned, to find that her purchases had finally been voided. She raised a tantrum. I finally told her, “Lady, you made me late for an appointment. Fifteen minutes passed from the time you left until you returned.” She turned on me viciously, and I wasn't very polite in my answer to her. I apologized later to her and thought all the way home that I hadn't shown Christ to her in my attitude and the tone of my voice.

## The Gospel According to You

We have been called out of spiritual darkness into spiritual light. That light, shining through us, may be the only illumination others have.

A poem I read once was about "*The Gospel According to You.*" It read  
Men read and admire the Gospel of Christ  
With its love so unfailing and true.  
But what do they say and what do they think  
Of the Gospel according to you?  
You are writing each day a letter to men.  
Take care that the writing is true;  
'Tis the only Gospel that some men will read,  
That Gospel according to you.

That says it pretty well. We walk on a well-lighted path, but in turn must become lights along the way for others to follow. We are to declare His praises far and wide. We are to show continually the Gospel living in us. How reads the "Gospel according to you (and to me)?"



## Chapter 38

# He Who Has the Son Has Life

### 1 John 5:1-12

The young guy was passing by a cemetery when he saw a very unusual graveside service going on. A very wealthy citizen was being buried in his Cadillac. The young man's eyes got big and he said, "Man, that's living!"

Would you say that he was a bit confused? He was not alone in his confusion, however. Countless people have a warped view of what life is all about, to say nothing of their inevitable death. My wife and I just saw two teenage girls outside of a restaurant smoking. I'm pretty sure they believed smoking's harmful effects on their health would not catch up with them. After all, they were still young and invincible!

### Trivial Concerns

How very many squander the only life they have on foolish behavior and pursuits! "Trivial" might be a good word to describe the concerns of many people. It is also a good word to describe much that is presented on TV. All of us may be guilty of devoting time and energy to causes and interests that are trivial, at least in comparison to the eternal. How many of us are addicted to football or some other sport? To gambling? To the latest Hollywood star, American Idol, hit tune?

When we turn to the world in general, we find this same condition. Huge numbers of people demonstrate, and even turn violent, as they march for or against illegal immigration, unionism, abortion, gay marriage, the current war, the president ...

### Seeking Life in the Wrong Way

Young Muslim men and women blow themselves up for their cause. Their dedication is admirable, but one must question any religion that fosters such suicidal sacrifice. I have in hand a cartoon showing a group of young Islamists attending a rally led by a mullah. One young man asks, "Um ... if being a martyr is so great, why don't you ever volunteer?" (Wiley Ink, *Non Sequitur*, 05-05-07).

Thousands march in India in honor of their patron god or goddess. Multitudes in North Korea bow before the image of their leader, Kim Jong

II. A group of Nepalese surgeons arrived in North Korea to treat cases of cataracts and other eye diseases. When citizens by the thousands recovered their former vision, instead of thanking the surgeons, they turned to portraits of their “glorious” leader, bowed low and thanked him for restoring their vision.

Millions in Brazil and Haiti frequent spiritist centers in an effort to find a solution to their many problems and ills. Multitudes in Guatemala and other Latin American countries sacrifice roosters to pagan gods, even as they attend Catholic masses.

These and countless more, the world over, seek life, but in the wrong way and the wrong place. They seek life through Allah, Krishna, Buddha ... They seek life through self-mutilation, monasticism, the repetition of secret formulas, traditional rituals and gifts to their god or spirit. All of this, however, is in vain. God tells us what it real and of first importance:

“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man,” is the conclusion of the whole matter of life (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## Holding God in the Highest Awe

Fearing God means holding Him in the highest awe. It means keeping His commandments. Specifically, it means giving our lives to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-3). According to 1 John 5:1-12, it means believing in, obeying and following Jesus Christ, God’s Son. John asks, “Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:5).

To overcome our difficulties and straighten out our priorities, we must believe in Christ and follow Him. Do we really want to have life? Do we really want to say, “Man, that’s living!” John tells us,

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

## Few Have Real Life

Is it any wonder that there is so much frustration, anger and hatred in the world? Very few of the earth’s multitudes have life in the above sense. Most are without God and therefore without hope (Ephesians 2:12). Those of us who have hope in Christ are under a special burden to hold out that hope to a hopeless, sin-beclouded world. We must tell our lost world that he who has the Son has life, and then show it how to come to Christ, live in Him and at the end, go to Heaven.

## Chapter 39

# I Have Set Before You an Open Door

### Revelation 3:7-13

When we were contemplating a possible change in direction, we found three doors open to us. I was asked to remain at Pepperdine University (then College) to continue directing the publications/ public relations program. Then I received a call to move to Abilene, Texas, to edit *The Christian Chronicle*. And there was an open door to Brazil, to go with a team that had been formed in my home state, Oregon. Which of the three should we enter? We were in a prayerful quandary. All were good services to be performed. We finally took up the Brazil offer. Meanwhile, the Pepperdine administrators decided to farm out the school's PR program. Then suddenly, the *Chronicle* was sold and a new editor was named.

So those two doors closed and the Brazil door remained wide open. We entered it, believing that it was the choice the Lord would have us make. To back up our commitment, a church we knew nothing about contacted us, offering full support, travel, working funds, and other expenses.

Long afterward, upon our return to the U.S doors continued to open. As I was finishing my doctorate, the Missions Department at Abilene Christian University called us to move there and help develop materials for missions education. Then, several years later, a door opened to edit *The Christian Chronicle*, then located at Oklahoma Christian University.

## Open Doors Mean Opportunities

Open doors mean opportunities. Paul experienced an open door in a dream, a door that led to evangelism in continental Europe (Acts 16:6-10). Later, he wrote that a "great door for effective work" in Ephesus had opened to him (1 Corinthians 16:9).

Paul watched and listened for doors to open before him, so that the Gospel might reach farther and farther afield. His dream was that the door to Spain, the farthest reach westward of the Roman Empire, might open to him. We don't know if he ever got there, but that was his dream.

## Doors Open Unexpectedly

Doors open when we least expect them to do so. The imprisoned Is-raelite slave, Joseph, found a door opening wide to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams. In so doing the ex-slave became prime minister of Egypt and, in that position, was able to save, not only Egypt but also his own family, from famine.

When the young widow Ruth chose to go with her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, from Moab to Israel, she chose Naomi's God, people and village. The two women were dirt-poor, so Ruth went out to glean stalks of grain missed or dropped by the harvesters. The very fields to which she went were those of Naomi's kinsman, Boaz. As the story unfolds, we find Boaz agreeing to claim the property owned formerly by Naomi's husband and sons. In so doing, he took Ruth as his wife and the two became great-grandparents of David, the psalmist, warrior and king.

Daniel, a young Jewish exile in Babylonia, was enabled by God to interpret the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar. In so doing he rose to a high administrative position in the Babylonian Kingdom. Shortly thereafter, under Persian rule, the young Jewish woman, Esther, walked through an open door into the King's palace and was crowned his queen. She was therefore able to save her people from destruction. Nehemiah, as the Persian ruler's cupbearer and confidant, was able to request of the king a leave-of-absence and materials to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The list could go on and on.

## Unusual Circumstances Open Doors

In more current times, before World War II the Church in Japan struggled to grow. The Church was a non-entity in Germany and Italy. Following the war, however, the situation changed dramatically. General MacArthur, post-war commander in Japan, saw that the nation had been humbled and, especially, had lost its emperor "god," when he declared himself not to be divine. Consequently, MacArthur called for 50,000 missionaries to enter that land, to take advantage of a suddenly open door to the hearts of the people. Unfortunately, he only received about 500 from all faiths. Those who went found a people ready to listen and churches sprang up all over the country. Post-war work in Germany and Italy flourished for a time.

Later on, when both the Berlin Wall and Russian Communism fell, a door opened to the entire former Soviet Union. Churches grew in many newly-independent nations and even in a number of Siberian cities.

## A Door No One Can Shut

But to bring us to the theme of this chapter, the Lord Jesus told the church in Philadelphia, “See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut” (Revelation 3:8). If the Lord opens a door, no human has the power to close it. Opportunities for mission outreach through such doors are unlimited, but the Lord doesn’t leave them open forever. Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia are not as receptive now as they were decades ago. Material success has closed hearts to the Gospel. In Japan the mighty yen has become god for many people. So we must be very alert to doors the Lord opens and enter them before they begin to close again.

## Chapter 40

# Purchased of God

## Revelation 5:6-14

In my many overseas travels I have made it a point to bring back a gift for my wife. One of the most recent was a pendant from Israel with wording on it from Song of Solomon: “I am my beloved’s and he is mine.” It became one of her special treasures. She even internalized it, literally, ac-cidentally swallowing it. Because it blocked an intestine, they had to cut it out. A dentist friend then cleaned it up in his lab and made a great ceremony of presenting it to her in her Bible class.

Making overseas purchases is an adventure. The purchaser is often expected to do some bargaining, at which I am something of a failure. Even when I manage to get the price down, the clerk’s broad smile as he wraps up the purchase tells me that I was still had.

### Jesus in the Purchasing Business

Jesus is also in the purchasing business. According to Revelation 5, He has purchased for God people from every tribe, language, people and nation. And what was the price He paid? His own precious blood! No greater cost has ever been exacted! Why did Yahweh determine to do this? Only by a blood sacrifice could humanity be redeemed from its sinful spin to self-destruction and eternal death. Not just any blood sacrifice would do, however. This kind of redemption required a perfect sacrifice — that of His perfect Son, Jesus. In Hebrews 10:8-14, the writer describes clearly the necessity of this offering:

“And by that will (the will of God), we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb.10:10).

### Jesus Paid the Purchase Price

Jesus paid the full price for all of humankind, that we all may be a kingdom and priests to serve our God. He wants everyone to be covered by His blood; to accept this glorious gift. He wants to purchase those enslaved to sin and give them their freedom in Him. He wants to be their great high priest, as they serve Him as under priests.

He is no ordinary high priest, but a high priest forever. Read what

Hebrews says about His nature as high priest:

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

## A Blessing Beyond Comprehension

All of this is a blessing beyond comprehension. The only problem with it is that so very many of our fellow humans don't know about Jesus, His sacrifice for us and His priesthood, or perhaps their understanding is distorted or their hearts are closed. He doesn't buy those whose hearts are not open to Him, nor does He buy those who are still ignorant of Him. “How shall they call on Him of whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14).

How, indeed? How shall they hear unless someone communicates with them? In the years leading up to our tragic American Civil War many people risked their lives smuggling slaves out of the South by what was called the Underground Railway. They were doing in a compassionate physical sense what we as God's redeemed must be doing today. They were freeing human beings from physical bondage. We are leading human beings from spiritual bondage by showing them how they may be purchased from their lostness by the Lord Jesus.

## No One Is Too Far from His Reach

Did you notice in this passage from Revelation 5 that freedom in Christ may be received by individuals from every tribe, language, people group and nation. No one is so far removed from Him that he is excluded from God's purchasing power. No language barrier is too high. No social class is too elevated or debased. No political system or religion is beyond penetrating for Him. As Peter said, our great Lord is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Since Christ is color and class blind, we too must be blind to the color or social level of those we encounter. We must be alert and ready to sharing our faith everywhere with everyone possible. That is our part in His purchasing those of

every land and people who open their hearts to Him in obedient faith.

## Chapter 41

# Suffering and Overcoming All for Christ

## Revelation 12:10-12

Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus never promised us physical life, political liberty or the pursuit of happiness. Instead, He promised that His faithful servants would suffer troubles (John 16:33). This has always been true, even back in Old Testament times. Look at the suffering Joseph un-justly endured. Look at how Jeremiah, Amos and the other prophets suffered. Look at Daniel, thrown into a lions' den. Look at John the Baptist, imprisoned for exposing the adulterous life of King Herod and finally beheaded. Look at how Jesus Himself was treated and how His apostles suffered imprisonment, whippings and martyrdom.

## Expect to Suffer

So, the faithful can expect to suffer. Down through the ages courageous men and women of God refused to deny their Lord and were executed. This still occurs, even in our "enlightened" age. In other parts of the world persecution of the faithful still goes on. World Bible Translation Center recently reported that a North Korean preacher was executed for distributing Bibles. Several church leaders in Oman, in southern Arabia, were executed for teaching others about their faith. During a weekend in Onalaska, Texas, where I was lecturing on Islam, I read a compelling book by Bilqis Sheikh, a noblewoman and Muslim in Pakistan who converted to belief in Christ and was boycotted by her family and threatened with death. Someone even tried to burn down her beautiful palace. She was finally able to flee to the U.S., just before a mob arrived at her home to kill her, but she lost her wealth and her high social position. In fact, her husband, who left her, is now Pakistani ambassador to another country. We, in the U.S., may never suffer the confiscation of our possessions and even loss of our lives, as early Christians did (Hebrews 10:32-34). Could we gladly do this for the name of Christ?



## Suffering Is Nasty Stuff

Our problem is that we thoroughly dislike suffering of any kind. We demand comfort and convenience. It is a major calamity if our air conditioning goes out. We are most distressed over a power outage. We want the latest gadgets, whatever they are, if they give us a more convenient life style. For awhile now we have had a vehicle with remote locking and unlocking. When I rented a car recently while ours was being repaired after a minor accident, I was somewhat put out that it had only an old-fashioned key.

One time at Christmas our family got together at a resort lake in south-central Oklahoma. We had hardly gotten there when the mother of all ice storms hit, downing trees and power lines. We were soon without electricity, telephone service and even water. Fortunately, there was a fireplace, so for several days we cooked over the crackling logs. For water we broke off ice cycles and melted them. For refrigeration we stored food in the back of a van. It was amazing! We actually enjoyed a simpler life without TV or other modern conveniences, so we didn't suffer all that much.

## Inconveniences on the Field

On the mission field we suffered various inconveniences. We had no vehicle at first. We had no telephone for years. Communication to home was slow, taking, even by air mail, a week to perhaps three weeks to arrive there. Long distance telephoning was difficult, requiring shouting into the phone and hoping to be understood. Due to the fact that water arrived at our house only twice a week during the night, my poor wife had to get up at terrible hours to wash our clothes. Today missionaries have instant e-mail connections, cell phones and other devices that were unheard of until recent years.

Real suffering is when a person comes down with some incurable form of cancer. Real suffering is when a home is reduced to match sticks during a tornado. Real suffering is when someone is laid off and can't find other employment. And real suffering is when we are punished severely for our faith. Many of us, like Job of old, have gone through intense tribulation. That is nothing new.

## Coping with Calamities

What is important is how we cope with such calamities. Can we come out of them saying, as did Job, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised”? (Job 1:21).

In Revelation 12:11 we find the key to handling whatever Satan throws against us:

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

It is the blood of Christ, continually cleansing us, and our own faith in Him that gives us strength to overcome whatever occurs in our lives. It is our faith in Christ that enables us to face death, whether by disease, accident or persecution. Those early Christians knew that they might any day be captured and imprisoned; perhaps even executed. Yet they did not shrink from death.

## Overcoming Is Key

In fulfilling our Lord’s commission, we may be called upon to enter lands that may well mean our death. I know of various missionaries or missionary wives who have succumbed to illnesses and finally death due to environmental dangers or accidents. They didn’t know this would happen to them, but realized that risks were involved in their service. As far as I know, none of them shrank from the potential dangers they encountered. They didn’t love their own lives so much that they returned to the relative security and comfort of home. Obviously, they were overcomers.

The true spirit of the missionary pioneer is one of overcoming by his or her testimony of faith in Christ, cost what it may. If we ever seriously penetrate the Muslim world, for instance, this kind of overcomer spirit will be tested to the maximum.

## Chapter 42

# All Nations Will Worship God

## Revelation 15:1-4

Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone could just get along? Every day brings to our Oklahoma City area stories of homicides, abuse, adultery, scams, identity theft, robbery, hatred, cheating and violence of every imaginable kind. Governments are not exempt from violence. Schools, obviously, are not exempt. Even churches are not exempt. Ministers and priests are caught in scandals. Churches are split asunder. Families are torn apart.

This should not be. Our great nation clearly was founded on Christian principles, as a multitude of documents and monuments attest. Our scholarly eastern universities were established by churches for the purpose of religious, as well as secular, training. Today we are far from the spiritual ideals upon which our nation and its institutions were built. We sometimes pay lip service to this noble tradition, but too often our hearts are far from God.

## Our Nation to Worship and Honor God

It was the Lord's intention for our nation to honor and worship Him. This was also the intention of at least most of our founding fathers. Here are some quotes from them:

**John Adams:** "The general principles upon which the Fathers achieved independence were the general principals of Christianity... I will avow that I believed and now believe that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God." [July 4th] ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty."

John Adams in a letter written to Abigail Adams on the day the Declaration of Independence was approved by Congress.

"We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. **Our Constitution was made**

**only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”** — *October 11, 1798*

**Charles Carroll**, signer of the Declaration of Independence: “Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure ... are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the best security for the duration of free governments.”

**Benjamin Franklin**: “God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this. I also believe that, without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel.”— *Constitutional Convention of 1787*

**Patrick Henry**, Orator of the Revolution: “It cannot be emphasized too clearly and too often that this nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religion, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ. For this very reason, peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here.”

These are just a few of the many statements by our founders that our nation was to worship God and follow His guidance. Otherwise, they declared, our nation would be doomed.

## Forces at Work to Silence God

Today, however, powerful forces are at work to remove God from all aspects of public life. This is utter folly. Revelation 15:3-4 says,

“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the Ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy.”

Let’s talk now about the rest of the world. Is it any better off? Europe has rapidly lost sight of God. Ethnic “cleansing” is the curse of Sudan. Rwanda is coming out of a very recent blood bath. Uprisings and civil wars rock much of Africa. Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan and much of the rest of the Middle East are in the midst of terrorism, religious strife and other evils. Iran rattles its nuclear saber. North Korea is a hostile dictatorship. Obviously, the world is gravely ill.

## The Only Solution

What is the solution? It is right there in Revelation:

“All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (Revelation 15:4).

If the 200-plus nations of our world suddenly came to acknowledge our Sovereign Lord’s righteous acts and bow down collectively to Him, changes for the better would soon begin to occur.

This will probably not happen by the Lord’s sudden appearance on all of the TV sets, His majestic voice booming out, “Worship and obey me now, or I will zap you!” **Rather, it will happen over a period of time when His faithful servants reveal His righteous acts to all of human-kind.**

## Chapter 43

# Do You Have a Wedding Invitation?

### Revelation 19:6-9

Weddings and funerals are, for the most part, still special occasions during which the attendees stand in honor of the bride at a wedding and of the deceased's family at a funeral. I like that and hope the practice never goes away. I also like the fact of the wedding party's being well dressed and would like it even more if the guests were a little more formal in dress, rather than in many cases, extremely casual in their attire. Some are dressed more for a sports event than a wedding.

At funerals some of the grieving family is dressed tastefully, but at one I attended recently, a man was dressed in work jeans and plaid shirt, and wearing a black cowboy hat throughout the solemnities. He may not have had a choice about his clothing, but certainly could have removed his hat out of respect.

### Special Clothing for Weddings

In Bible times those invited to wedding festivities were expected to wear special clothing. In Matthew 22 we find Jesus telling a story about a wedding feast. Most of those present were dressed appropriately, but one was not. Because of this, he was booted out of the feast. This, of course, is symbolic of the wedding feast of the Lamb, at which those participating are dressed in royal raiment befitting the wedding banquet God holds in honor of His Son and the Son's Bride, the Church.

We can draw several applications from this parable. One is that those making up the Son's wedding party must be garbed properly. That is, their spiritual clothing must be holy and without blemish. Another is that some find their way into the wedding feast with ulterior motives, insincere conversion or a lapse into worldliness or bitterness. They lose their right to be a part of the festivities because they are unqualified to be there. Those in such a condition bring their eternal fate upon themselves.

Now turning to the wedding feast described in Revelation 19, we read.

“Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude ... shouting: ‘Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ ... Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

## Eternal Wedding of the Lamb

This is stirring symbolic language referring to the eternal wedding of the Lamb (Christ) and His bride, the church. First, John heard what sounded like a multitude in Heaven shouting praises to the Lord God Almighty. The largest crowd I have ever seen in person was at a football game. The roar that went up when a team scored was still insignificant compared to the roar of the multitude of saints in Heaven, as it sang praises to God. When the Lord designed the Church from before time began, He planned for it to number a vast multitude. He wanted and still wants to have billions of His saints with Him in Heaven. Let us imagine the scene:

“The City of God shines brilliantly of gold and precious stones. It is a place beyond calculation in size and splendor. Entering its gates, I see a main avenue paved with golden stones and bordered by the River of Life. Beautiful mansions are everywhere along the avenue and stretching into the distance along other streets. It all takes my breath away. It is so glorious that words cannot adequately describe it.

“In the very center of this celestial complex is a great throne on which sits our majestic God Himself, surrounded by His holy angels. Before the throne stands a multitude greater than I can count. In this crowd are people of every race, language and color. Here are Japanese, Chinese, Indo-nesians, Malaysians, Indians, Pakistanis, Iraqis, Iranians, Arabs, Jews, Sy-rians, Armenians, Greeks, Italians, Russians, Scandinavians, Europeans, Africans of every tribe, Australians, Latin Americans, Caribbean peoples, Brazilians, North Americans, Native Americans and countless others, all adding their praises to the Lord. Such a roar! It sounds like a great waterfall or peals of thunder.

“What is the occasion? It is the heavenly wedding of the Lamb and His Bride. The Bride has overcome all persecution. She is ready for the wedding ceremony to begin. She is robed in the finest pure white linen,

radiant as only a bride can be. Blessed, indeed, are all of those invited to this feast.”

## No Greater Honor

No greater honor could befall a soul than to sit down with the Lamb and break Heaven’s bread with Him. And no greater honor can befall us here on earth than to be asked to extend our Lord’s invitation to others to attend this glorious feast in Heaven. The congregation I serve as an elder has special Sundays in which each member is to bring a friend to worship. I ask my neighbors to go with me to these services, but most turn down the invitation. This should be no surprise, because in Matthew 22 and Luke 14 Jesus gives a parable about a feast to which those invited refused to go. The host then ordered that his servants to go out everywhere and bring even the poor, the humble and the foreigner to his banquet. I consider it a thankless task to invite my neighbors to worship with me. Wrong attitude! I must do what I can. I must invite them, but I cannot force them to accept the invitation.

## Hearts Open to Christ

Praise the Lord, there are many open hearts in the world, just waiting for someone to direct them to Christ. Once brought to Him, getting acquainted with Him and submitting to Him in baptism, these tender hearts join the great family of God worldwide. Then, when the heavenly wedding feast is ready, these souls of every family, clan, tribe, people group, tongue, color, city and nation will sit down with their Savior at the feast, praising God for their deliverance. And to think that we can have our own small part in directing them toward the eternal wedding feast!



## Chapter 43

# Unending Water for the Thirsty

## Revelation 21:1-7

The Negev in southern Israel is a parched land, much of it rocky mountains and valleys. As we drive up the Scorpion Assent, the ancient pass from the Negev to the road leading to Egypt, this appears to be no place for man or beast. The ascent itself has more hairpins than a beauty shop. Reaching the top, one can look out over desolation as far as the eye can see.

Yet there is life in that deadly region. Suddenly there appears an oasis filled with date palms, verdant grass and a spring or pool of water. Even the area around the oasis can be cultivated by channeling water from that life-giving source. At another spot of green, at the ruins of ancient Tamar, a great jujube tree, more than 2,000 years old, has multiple trunks reaching down to the water table. The spring at Tamar has refreshed at least Midianites, Israelites, Nabateans, Romans and now American and Israeli archeological teams.

## Water Basic to Physical and Spiritual Life

Water is basic to life. Ancient peoples fought over water rights. For example, Abraham and Isaac dug wells and fought with usurpers over them. In our own history the matter of water rights was cause for court cases and even shootouts. David talked in Psalm 23 about being led by the Lord by still waters, symbolic of safety and sustenance.

The Lord invited all who were thirsty to

“... come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:1-2).

Jesus told His listeners that He is the source of living water:

“... whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13).

“... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life” (Revelation 21:6).

The living water flowing out of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8) was fulfilled by Christ and His Church:

“On the last and greatest day of Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come unto me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him’” (John 7:37-38).

## Thirst for Something Enduring

Humans thirst for something that is enduring. They seek it in all of the wrong places — on the athletic field, the stage, movies and TV, politics, business, travel, Internet porn, sexual adventures and misadventures, alcohol and other drugs, deceit, scams, robbery, murder ... and yet their thirst is not quenched. This is no wonder, for they drink bitter water, rather than the water of life. One time I attempted to float in the extremely salty Dead Sea. It didn't work, because, just as happens in any other water, my feet began to sink. In an attempt to right myself, I splashed water into my eyes. They burned like fury for a long time. That was enough of the poisonous water of the Dead Sea for me. It could neither quench thirst, nor support my body, any more than many of the frantic diversions of life can quench spiritual thirst. Lately some have come to us seeking spiritual substance, which they had found lacking in other religions. “This is more like it!” commented one man as he noticed a Bible class teacher open the Word and explain it in understandable terms.

## Jesus, the Only Water That Quenches

Jesus is the eternal Water of Life, the only water that quenches the deep thirst in our souls. He is the spring of living water. Without His presence in our lives, we are cast ashore on a desert island without hope of relief for our spiritual thirst. The sad thing is that He offers us water of life without cost. Yet, so many say, “No thanks, I have my own water.”

Among all of the billions crowding our little globe, few are tasting the Water of Life. Why is this? It is simply because, like the Samaritan woman in John 4, the majority have never heard that it is freely available to them. All understand the need for water and many will understand the imagery of Jesus as the Water of Life, if they just have an opportunity to hear about Him. How shall they hear without someone explaining Him to them and offering them a drink from the Fountain of Life?

## Chapter 45

# The Spirit and the Bride Say, “Come!”

### Revelation 22:17

I like weddings. They may be simple affairs, such as ours was in 1948. I had finished my undergraduate studies and had only a department head's assistant's salary, a low-paying position. My intended bride had an entrance-level salary in an insurance office. Her mother made her gown and those of the bridesmaids. My tux was borrowed from our college. But it was no less joyous than any grand ceremony. We went on a brief honeymoon at a borrowed mountain cabin, with only \$25 to our name.

Some weddings today are much more luxurious, with an impressive group of attendants and a lavish reception. However, they may not last 60 years, as has ours. It may not be the cost of the occasion that determines the quality of a marriage, but the genuine quality of the vows taken, the covenant nature of the ceremony and the determination to remain together, “until death do us part.”

### Ancient Custom Regarding Marriage

In Bible days young people intent on marriage did not choose each other. Rather, the bride-to-be was chosen by the man's father, perhaps with the help of a matchmaker, who joined with the bride's father in a dowry contract. But the ceremony didn't immediately follow. The groom had to build a house or room for his bride, and it had to pass muster by the critical eye of the bride's father. Then, in a special ceremony, the man would drink a sip of wine from a cup and then offer it to his intended. If she drank from it, the matter was sealed. They were officially engaged, but had to wait for a year to consummate their marriage. If she refused the wine, so much for a wedding feast!

When the feast was finally ready, the man and his wedding party would go at night to the bride's home, where a candle was glowing in a window. This was a sign that she was dressed and the feast was ready. Her companions would be waiting for the groom's arrival. When he came, they would light their lamps, meet his party and accompany him into the house, as we see in Matthew 25.

## The Bible Ends with a Marriage Invitation

In the imagery of marriage customs of that day the Bible ends with an invitation. The Spirit of Christ and His Bride say, “Come!” It is not only our Lord who extends to us an invitation to join His wedding feast, but also His Bride, the Church. We who are a part of His Bride are involved in this great invitation. We extend it to all others about us and to those throughout the world. Not everyone will accept the invitation, but they must be given the opportunity to either accept it or reject it. We see an example of this in Matthew 22, when those invited to a prince’s wedding feast snubbed the invitation. Finally the king’s servants were told to go out into the streets and invite any and all to the feast.

The invitation of the Spirit and the Bride involves the hearers of this invitation also. They are to add their voice to the call: “And let him who hears, say, ‘Come!’” So the call is echoed by the mouth of all who hear and heed the call. “COME, COME, COME!” reverberates from continent to continent. “COME, ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY FOR THE WATER OF LIFE! It is free for the taking.” What a lifesaving call this is!

To our so-very-lost world, groping in the blackness of its hopeless life, we must ask,

“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:2).

## In the Food and Drink Business

The Lord’s church is to be in the business of providing food and drink to a famished and thirsty world — physical food and drink, if necessary, but far more important, spiritual food and drink. We are, without any doubt, very good in the material food and drink business. Not a week passes in my home church without at least four meals being served in the fellowship hall and children’s Bible hour room. Then when our people go on campaign trips to Mexico, Nicaragua or other locations, food is again provided.

This kind of fellowship and benevolence is great, but pales in comparison to providing spiritual food and drink to those countless souls in need. So let us redouble our efforts to inviting the world to our Lord’s table spread with the most nourishing food and drink that has ever existed. “Come,” say the Spirit and the Bride, “come take the free gift of the water (and nourishment) of life!” This is our very reason for being.

## Chapter 46

# Does the Fire Still Burn in our Bones?

Jeremiah 20:9

In these three volumes we have come full-cycle through the Bible. The theme has been the same throughout: God has always wanted to save all of mankind. He has always wanted His people to be his voice in the world, to transmit His message to others. He has always wanted us to feel an intense fire in our bones to share our faith. Jeremiah tried to quench the fire, but could not. Amos was told to shut up, get out of pagan Bethel and return to his own land, but he refused to do so. None of the prophets could be stopped. Even fearful Jonah still had to face enemy Nineveh with the Lord's message. David's seer, Nathan, confronted him with his sins and their consequence.

### Dying for Their Faith

In New Testament times, courageous John the Baptist condemned King Herod for his adultery and lost his head because of it. Jesus had many enemies who sought His death, yet He resolutely set His face toward Jerusalem and the certainty of His own crucifixion. The apostles, beaten and ordered to cease preaching about Jesus, returned immediately to the temple courtyard and resumed their preaching. Paul faced death often and finally died a martyr. These heroes of the faith were unstoppable. They were consumed with their mission.

As the early centuries passed, thousands of faithful Christians died for their faith. Polycarp, a bishop, was arrested on the charge of being a Christian — a member of a politically “dangerous” cult whose rapid growth needed to be stopped. The Roman proconsul took pity on such a gentle old man and urged him to proclaim, “Caesar is Lord.” If only Polycarp would make this declaration and offer a small pinch of incense to Caesar's image, he would escape death. Polycarp responded, “Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” Steadfast in his faith, Polycarp refused to compromise his beliefs, and was burned alive at the stake.

## Wholehearted Devotion to the Mission

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century Ramón Lull, a Basque intellectual, was determined to influence Muslim leaders to turn to Christ. After several missions to North Africa, he was warned never to return. At about 80 years of age, he went back to Muslim lands and was martyred.

William Carey, an humble cobbler from Hackleton, England, devoted many years to missions in India. He was run out of the British-controlled region, settling at Serampore, under Danish control. He fought illness and poverty, as well as almost insurmountable paganism, but eventually translated the Bible, or portions of it, into almost 40 different languages, headed the Serampore College, organized 16 mission stations with 47 evangelists. Here was a man without formal theological or missions training, but a man in whom was that fire that moved him to great service.

David Livingstone was a man of magnificent character and dignity who won even the respect of Arab slave traders to whom he was a threat. He loved the people of Africa so much that he once faced a charging lion to save a black boy, heand carried the scars of that encounter the rest of his life. When he died, African people buried his heart in Africa and carried his body to the coast, to be transported to England. It now lies entombed in Westminster Abbey.

Robert Morrison suffered untold difficulties in attempting to learn Chinese and teach the people of China. In 27 years' time he mastered both Mandarin and Cantonese, and translated the Bible into Chinese, along with a dictionary, grammar and other books. He distributed millions of pages of Scripture. He also established an Anglo-Chinese college.

We do not know if these missionary heroes were ever baptized for New Testament reasons or if they taught the New Testament plan for salvation and the church. Because of their religious affiliatuons, probably not. However, they paved the way into several countries. They translated the Bible and prepared much printed material. Those who followed them have entered those doors they opened and used their Bibles.

## Some of Our Own Missionary Heroes

J.M. McCaleb arrived in Japan in 1892, at a time when the Japanese considered themselves of divine origin and separate from all other peo-

ples. Their emperor was believed to be a god. Their state religion was Shinto. Foreigners were tolerated, at best. McCaleb struggled in every way, even financially. After 50 years of faithful service there, when the U.S. declared war on Japan following Pearl Harbor, McCaleb was forcibly driven out of Japan as a dangerous alien. Brokenhearted, he boarded ship, but left behind several churches and capable national leaders for them.

Space would fail us to talk in detail about so many other missionary pioneers of the Lord's church. In Africa there were the John Sheriffs, George Scotts, W.L. Browns, George Hooks, J.C. Shewmakers, Orville Brittells, J.D. Merritts, A.B. Reeces, W.N. Shorts, Alvin Hobbys, Eldred Echols and so many others, including Augustas Brittell, who acted as mother of 80 homeless children in what is now Zambia. In Asia there were the George Bensons, H.G. Cassells, W.J. Bishops, the Fox family, Sarah Andrews, the Bixlers, Rhodes, B.D. Moreheads, E.L. Broaduses, Oldhams, Lowell Davises, Roy Whitfields and Elizabeth Bernard.

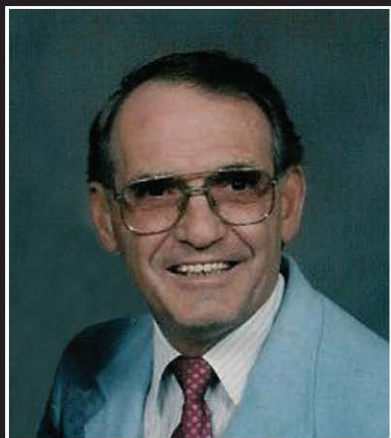
There are so many others — pioneers to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, North America, Central and South America.... These, as well as those mentioned above, felt the fire of evangelism burning in their hearts for their host peoples. This consuming fire is what kept many of them on the field for many years and, in some cases, even for life.

## How Strong Is the Fire in Our Bones?

How strongly is the fire burning in our bones? Some congregations are on fire for world missions, while others have a nominal mission program, as just one of many ministries, or no specific or long-lasting mission anywhere. Some individuals, especially the younger and more idealistic, are dedicating their lives to missions somewhere. They are, however, the few and the brave. May their numbers multiply, until the world is ablaze with their message and sacrificial living.

May all of you who read this rededicate your life to kindling a fire in your bones, both for local and worldwide evangelism. Never has there been a greater need in our world torn by wars, conflicting ideologies and evil on an almost unprecedented scale. And never has there been a more noble calling than that of leading souls lost in darkness to the light of our Lord's Way.





Brother Glover Shipp, now deceased, was a retired missionary and editor. He wrote 40 books on a wide variety of subjects. Eight of these, on mission work, have been published by *World Evangelism (Choate) Publications*. He and his wife, Margie, devoted 18 years to missionary service in Brazil, specializing in publications in the Portuguese language. He taught and lectured in 51 countries, was fluent in Portuguese and

Spanish, and studied French, Russian, Hebrew and Greek. Following their return to the United States in 1985, Glover completed his doctorate and then served as managing and senior editor of *The Christian Chronicle*. He served as an elder in the Edmond, OK Church of Christ from 1992.

Brother Shipp began with volume one of [Fire in My Bones](#), but volumes two and three have also been written and printed. They are available from World Evangelism Publications, P.O. Box 72, Winona, MS 38967. After finishing volume three, brother Shipp wrote:

**“It was Frustrating to end the second volume of [Fire in My Bones](#) at the beginning, so to speak. I am thankful that God has provided me the time and opportunity to follow the flaming thread of mission from Acts to Revelation and beyond. These three volumes should suffice to prove to us, once and for all, that God’s redemptive fire has always burned in the hearts of His people, and must also burn in ours.**

**“As I write this, the flame is sputtering, and even going out, in churches where it once burned brightly, while in others it only now is beginning to catch hold. Unfortunately, for many of us this fire is an option rather than a mandate. If it is convenient, we may fan it a bit. My ardent prayer is that all of us may permit God’s eternal flame to consume us with a passion for every lost soul, rather than merely playing with matches.”**

— Glover Shipp