

Preaching the Word of God

Be ready in season and out of season; convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Timothy 4:2).

By Loy Stanley Mitchell

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Publisher's Statement

Loy and Donna Mitchell are some favorite people of mine. Betty and I have known them for many years. We have visited them in Zimbabwe more than once when they lived and worked there as missionaries. I can remember waking up in the morning and hearing Loy as he read the scripture aloud in the local language. I can remember him driving along in his Pickup, and as he passed people along the way he would drop tracts so that they would fall at the feet of those who were walking. Invariably, they would reach down and pick them up and read as they continued their journey. Many were converted through those tracts. I can remember Loy teaching Bible classes in the Mutare Preacher Training School, and preaching to people sitting patiently under a tree. Both Betty and I have many memories of Loy and Donna., and they are good memories.

Living now in Topeka, KS and working with the Northside Church of Christ, the Mitchells continue to return to Zimbabwe each year to help with that work. They love the Lord and are doing all they can to spread His cause both at home and abroad.

I am happy that Loy has written and brought together the articles that appear in this book and I am especially pleased to be able to print them for all of the good they will do here and around the world. God bless you, Loy and Donna, and we look forward to the good things that will come from you and your family members in the years ahead.

J. C. Choate
August 15, 2001

Introduction

The following are lessons taken from bulletins of the Northside Church of Christ, Topeka, Kansas.

Loy Mitchell preached for many years in Zimbabwe. He has also preached in Texas and Oklahoma and has spoken in lectureships and gospel meetings. He was born in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1932, and has degrees from Oklahoma Christian University and Abilene Christian University. He has worked with Mutare Bible School, formerly Nhowe Bible School in Africa.

It is his belief that the church bulletin should be a teaching tool and he has published these weekly articles in the Northside bulletin.

Scriptures used are taken from the New King James Translation and McCord's New Testament Translation. A few texts are taken from the New American Standard Version and the New International Version.

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Noah Found Favor

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8, NIV).

What a blessing! Noah found favor with the Lord. The rest of mankind was busy thinking and doing evil. *“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time”* (Genesis 6:5, NIV). Thus God decided to destroy mankind. God was grieved at the sin of man. Surely it must grieve God today to see the sins being committed by men.

What did God see in Noah? He saw a man of faith! *“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith”* (Hebrews 11:7, NIV). This great chapter of Hebrews is filled with wonderful examples of men and women who lived by faith. *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”* (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). This man trusted God. Do you and I trust Him?

What did this faith cause Noah to do? First, we see his faith caused him to prepare an ark. God commanded him to build an ark and he did exactly as he was told. *“And Noah did just as the Lord commanded him”* (Genesis 6:22, NIV). He used the right kind of wood. He made it the right height, width and length just as God told him to do. His faith caused him to be obedient to God. If we are people of true faith, we will obey the Lord in everything.

Next, we see that his faith caused him to preach the message of righteousness. *"If He did not spare the ancient world when He brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others"* (2 Peter 2:5, NIV). True faith will cause us to speak to others of Christ, God and His plan of salvation. No, Noah did not convert the world of his day, but seven others did heed the word of righteousness and entered the ark. They were saved. Let us be people of faith. Let us show our faith by obeying God and preaching to others about God and His way. May God help us to do that!

That He May Command His Children

"For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:19).

God was about to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Should Abraham be told of this impending destruction? Yes, God would reveal this truth to the "Father of the Faithful."

God knew Abraham. He knew this man as a man of faith. He knew this man as an obedient person who demonstrated his faith by action. He had left his country and people and gone to a far country. But God also knew him as a man who would *com-*

mand his children. Not only would this man command his children but he would also command his household or servants. Does God know you? Father, does He know you as a dad who will command his children?

God could trust Abraham. Yes, he later would offer his son on an altar. God saw a man whose heart would lead him into a life of dedication and service. God saw a person who lived what he spoke. Abraham lived a consistent life. His children could see what was first in his daily living. Parents, what a power there is in a good example! Our children are not blind. They see that God is important when you take time daily to let God speak by reading, studying and meditating on His word. They see clearly that knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ is a priority when you take time every day to read, sing, and pray with your children.

God would bless Abraham. Blessings from God are contingent upon submission to God. Why did Isaac live a faithful life? What caused this Son to walk in the steps of Abraham? Yes, God did bless not only Abraham but also Isaac and then his son, Jacob. They had the protection and care of God. Then through this lineage came the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

God is ready and willing to bless you, too. Are you commanding your children by word and example? What a joy to see parents and grandparents making sure their young ones are always in Bible classes Sunday morning and Wednesday night.

Perhaps Joseph Will Hate Us

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead,

they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will hate us and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him''
(Genesis 50:15).

What a sad picture. Jacob had died at the age of 147 years. Now the brothers of Joseph feared that Joseph would repay them evil for the evil they had done to him. They knew the evil they had done to their younger brother. According to chapter 39, verse 11, the brothers "envied him." Joseph was a favorite of his father who gave him a tunic of many colors. Jacob made a mistake to love one child more than the others. Then there were the dreams Joseph had which were interpreted to mean that Joseph would reign over his brothers. This envy led the brothers to the decision to kill him. *"Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him'. We shall see what will become of his dreams"* (Genesis 37:20). One sin leads to another. We see envy grow to the desire to kill and then a decision to lie about his death. Then when a company of Ishmaelites came they decided to make a profit by selling their brother into slavery.

Many years passed. Joseph became a ruler in Egypt. There was a world-wide famine and the brothers came to Egypt to buy food for their starving families. Who was there to sell the food? Joseph, their brother; but they did not recognize him. Joseph accused them of being spies. He asked to see their younger brother Benjamin and he kept Simeon a prisoner to make sure that they would bring Benjamin on their next trip.

The brothers had changed over the years. *"Then they said to one another, 'We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we*

would not hear; therefore his distress has come upon us'" (Genesis 42:21).

Finally Joseph revealed himself to them when they brought Benjamin. Did Joseph repay evil for evil? No! *"But now, do not therefore be grieved nor angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life"* (Genesis 45:5). Yes, God took an evil deed and out of it came something good. The gathering of food in Egypt by Joseph meant food and life for the children of Israel. Now Jacob the father was dead. Would Joseph punish them now? No! *"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive"* (Genesis 50:20).

Moses' Rod

"So the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?'
And he said, 'A rod'" (Exodus 4:2).

What was this rod? Likely it was a simple shepherd's staff or rod. It was made of wood and perhaps used to shepherd his sheep and to help support a man eighty years of age.

How was this rod used? *"And he said, 'Cast it to the ground.'* *So he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it"* (Exodus 4:3). When Moses complied with God's command it became a living serpent. This same rod turned the water into blood, brought lice, brought thunder, hail and lightning. This rod brought locusts and divided the Red Sea. What a great demonstration of power!

How could a simple rod do all of this? The answer is quite simple. Once Moses complied with the instructions of God, it became an instrument to do God's will. In fact, it is called the rod of God in Exodus 4:20b, "*And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.*" By the rod Moses was convinced he was to lead the Israelites. By this the Israelites were freed from Egyptian bondage. Yes, by this rod the waters of the sea parted.

Brethren, we too should be the instruments of God to do His will. Consider these passages carefully.

"Be submissive therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

"I have strength for every situation through the one who gives me power" (Philippians 4:13).

"What therefore shall we say about these things? If God is on our side, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Our money, possessions, time and our bodies belong to God. He wants to use us to serve Him and to lead the lost to salvation. Will you be like Moses and allow that to happen? You will be richly blessed!

Profane Fire

"Nadab and Abihu had died before the Lord when they offered profane fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests under the oversight of Aaron their father" (Numbers 3:4).

Who committed this sin? The two oldest sons of Aaron the high priest. They had been duly appointed and consecrated for this work. This was their *only* work and there is no reason to believe they did not know what kind of fire to offer. We, as children of the God of heaven, must beware lest we, knowing that we are to worship God in spirit and in truth, fail to worship as taught by the Lord (John 4:23,24).

What sin did they commit? The passage above says that they *“offered profane fire before the Lord.”* This was fire which was “strange” or “unauthorized.” The fire to be used was the holy fire from the ever-burning fire from the altar. All offerings to God must be according to His instructions. Thus these two priests acted presumptuously by offering fire not authorized by God. They showed no respect for what God commanded and thus showed no respect for the great God of heaven. Is it wise for us today to examine everything we do in worship and work to make sure it is authorized by God?

What was the punishment for their sin? *“Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord”* (Leviticus 10:1,2). What they did was careless and dangerous! God’s punishment was swift and sure. What an impressive and important lesson for the Israelites. God will not accept any fire. God expects His people to offer what He commands.

I shudder to think how men today spurn the commands in the Bible regarding what we offer to God in worship. Some simply do not worship. Some are too busy with work, sports or are just plain lazy. Such people have no hope of living with God forev-

er. They can only have the promise of an eternity in a devil's hell. Today most churches have changed the worship of God into entertainment times. Little or no thought is given to what the great I AM wants in worship. Have we forgotten what Jesus said? *"In vain they worship me, teaching as precepts the commandments of men. You have forsaken the commandment of God, and are keeping the tradition of men"* (Mark 7:7,8).

We Ourselves Will Be Armed

"But we ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land" (Numbers 32:17).

This was the promise of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. These tribes desired their inheritance to be on the east side of the Jordan River where the pasture was abundant. They would build fortified cities and places for the sheep and cattle. When the Israelites would cross the Jordan to capture the land to the west, they would be there to help conquer the land.

They were armed! These people of God would have great battles when they would cross the Jordan River. They had already fought and defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan. God had given them victory on the east and He would do the same to the west. However, they would have to

make preparation. Their children would need cities where they would be safe and they would have to prepare themselves for battles with the people of Canaan.

Moses gives a warning! *“But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out”* (Numbers 32:23).

Moses agreed with these two and one-half tribes that they could have the land east of the Jordan. But if they failed to fight on the other side of the Jordan, they would have committed sin. What sin? The sin of failing to do what they promised to do. They had promised to fight. They had promised to help the other tribes secure their inheritance. It would be a sin if they failed to do this. In fact, Moses told them plainly that if they failed to do this, their sin would find them out.

Brethren, we need to arm ourselves for battle. Satan and his army are busy fighting. He has millions who are his captives. Let us arm ourselves with the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit. Let us go forth to fight the devil and sin. When we repented and were baptized, did we not promise to follow our captain, Jesus Christ? He has told us to teach all nations. He has told us to preach the gospel to all creation. It is a sin to fail to do as He has commanded us. Children of the Lord are needed to reach out and teach others. Let us go forth to victory!

Observe Them

“Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peo-

ples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4:6).

Moses is 120 years old and about to die. The Israelites are ready to cross the Jordan River and enter the land of Canaan. Moses repeats the laws God gave at Mount Sinai some forty years before. This is a new generation of people since all those above the age of twenty when they came out of Egypt are dead. Only two above this age, Joshua and Caleb, would be allowed to enter the promised land.

What were they told to observe? They were to observe the statutes and judgments of God given by the Lord God at Mount Sinai through the prophet Moses. They were commanded to listen to these statutes and observe them. They were not to add to or take anything away from the commandments of God *"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you"* (Deuteronomy 4:1). No person, priest or prophet had the right or power to change a single law or decree of God.

What would be the blessing for observing these commands?

1. They would live! *"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you"* (Deuteronomy 4:2). Keeping God's decrees means life, not death!
2. They would go into the land and possess it. This was a rich land described as a land flowing with milk and

honey. That land would be their possession if they would keep the statutes and judgments of God.

3. This would be their wisdom and understanding. This would be wisdom in the sight of God and in the sight of the peoples who would hear of these laws (verse 6).

Were these statutes to be taught to others? Yes, yes! *“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. **And teach them to your children and your grandchildren**”* (Deuteronomy 4:9). Failure to teach their children and grandchildren meant death for the Israelites.

The story of what happened to Israel is not a pretty one, for they failed to observe the statutes. They failed to keep the laws of God and God punished them. Thousands were killed and others were carried away into captivity. How sad! Brethren, what about us today? Should we not be busy observing the new covenant of Jesus Christ? We dare not add or take away from His word. We are not only to teach our children, but all nations. The task is great, the rewards are wonderful, but failure means death.

Impress, Talk, Tie and Write

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:5-9, NIV).

Moses was about to die and in Deuteronomy he gives the laws of God for the new generation of Israelites before they enter the promised land. They were to love God with their whole being. Jesus, years later, said this was the first and greatest commandment. Now look at what they were to do for their children.

Impress these commands of God upon your children. How is this done? You teach them diligently. Let your children know that God and His commandments are the most important aspects of our lives. Read to them the word of God every day. Make certain that you and your children **never** miss a Bible class time or worship period on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Talk about God's commandments. Review with your children what they heard in the public lessons and at Bible classes. Talk about how these messages from God will mold and shape their lives for now and eternity. By talking of the commands daily you let your children know how important this is. Talk about them as you sit in your house or as you travel along the road in your car. Turn off the TV and radio and let them hear God's commandments. Buy some good sermon tapes and listen with your children to the Word of the Lord.

Tie the commands of God as symbols. Jews carried out these commands literally by writing Scriptures on their hands and foreheads. Wherever the child looked, there was the word of God.

Write the commands of God. Post Scriptures on the refrigerator, the mirrors and on the walls. When the clothes are folded to be put away, write a Scripture and put that in the clothing. Do the same in the lunch boxes. When we write our children or send an e-mail message, include the commands of God.

Brethren, parents, it is later than you think. Will our children be lost in the hell prepared for the devil and his angels? Will they miss heaven because we failed to teach them? Let us **impress, talk, tie, and write** the commands of God.

How Can I Live and Be Well?

"And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them" (Deuteronomy 5:1).

There are three points to being successful. Three things that will help me live and be well.

Hear the statutes and judgments of God. Hear God's words. How? Make sure you are present every time the church assembles. Make sure you truly listen to each lesson delivered by the teacher or preacher. Most churches have meetings at least three times weekly when Christians can come and hear messages of God delivered by faithful proclaimers of the word. Day by day we all can open our own Bibles and read (hear) God's messages. Get into this good habit of being a **daily Bible reader**.

Learn them. Learn the will of God. Study! Study! That takes time. Yes! That takes effort. Yes! But look at the blessings. We will learn who God is. One will learn His will for man. Through study of the Bible one will learn how to live. One will learn that only in Christ can we have salvation. I challenge each reader not to read or hear only, but to learn or know the commands of the Lord.

Observe them. Listening to the word of God is wonderful. Learning the will of God is a great blessing and attribute. The last step seems to be the most difficult. **Observe the statutes and judgments of God.** Too many are like the foolish man who heard the will of the Lord, but he did not do as he was told and thus his house fell when the storm came. Let us **walk the walk** and not just **talk the talk**. *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves”* (James 1:22).

Now listen to Moses again. *“You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess”* (Deuteronomy 5:33).

Read It all the Days of His Life

“And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes” (Deuteronomy 17:19).

When God chose a king for Israel this king was to heed strict teachings of God. He was not to live in any way he chose.

These were the prohibitions to the king.

Do not multiply horses for yourself (Deuteronomy 17:16).

Do not multiply wives for yourself lest your heart be turned away (verse 17a).

Do not multiply silver and gold (verse 17b).

There were several positive commands for the king.

He shall have his own copy of the law of God (verse 18).

He shall read from this law of God **all the days of his life** (verse 19).

He shall fear the Lord his God (verse 19).

He shall be careful to observe all the words of the law of God (verse 19).

He shall be humble (verse 20a).

He shall not turn away to the right or left from the commandments of God (verse 20b).

Blessings would come to the king if he obeyed.

“That his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel” (Deuteronomy 17:20).

These are good commandments for Christians today.

Do not multiply automobiles, wives and money. Life

consists of far more than these items.

Have your own personal copy of the Bible and **be a daily Bible reader!**

Learn to fear God and keep His commandments.

Be humble toward God and your fellow man.

Do not turn to the left or right, but strictly follow the teachings of God.

When we observe these things we will be blessed. *“Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matthew 25:34).

Circumcise Your Heart

“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6).

The children of Israel were about to cross over the Jordan River into the promised land. They belonged to God, having been brought out of the land of slavery in Egypt. In chapter thirty Moses reminded them of five great things.

They belonged to God. They would have to remove the obstinacy covering their hearts. They would have to open these uncircumcised hearts to God by loving Him with all their hearts and souls. Physical circumcision would not be enough for the Israelites, nor is it enough for us today. *“For neither is circum-*

cision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15).

They must obey the Lord. They would be richly blessed. *“If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 30:10).* There was no blessing for the disobedient and the same is true today. We must obey the Lord.

They could understand this commandment of God. *“For this commandment which I command you today, it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off” (verse 11).* His command was known; it had been revealed. There was no excuse for them not to obey nor is there any excuse for us today. We have Bibles. We can read the word of God in our own language and understand that word.

They could choose life or death. *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (verse 15).* Man is not a machine or robot with no power of choice. We can choose to be good and do good or we can choose to be evil and do evil things.

They should choose life. *“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (verse 19).* What will you choose today? We implore you to choose life by following Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15,16).

Choose for Yourselfes

“And if it seems evil to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Man has the power or ability to choose. This is the way God created man. He is not a robot, but rather he can choose to do good or evil. Man can choose the way he wishes to live. Joshua, nearing the end of his good life, reminds the people of their ability to choose. Man must remember that with every choice there will be certain consequences or blessings. If man chooses sin, then the wages are death. If man chooses Jesus Christ, there is eternal life.

This choice is made today. I hear some people say, “Some day I will make a choice to become a Christian. Yes, preacher, some day I will choose to repent and be baptized.” The fact that you do not choose Jesus today means that you have chosen to serve another “god.” All those who do not follow Jesus as Lord are following someone else. Each day we awaken, we make a choice. Who will you follow today? Today is the day of salvation for all who will repent.

Joshua made the good choice. He said that he and his family (house) would serve the Lord. He was a man of courage. He was a man of conviction. Joshua knew God was the only true and living God. This God had delivered them out of Egyptian bondage. This God he had chosen was the God who fed them in

the wilderness for forty years. This God was the same God who brought them into the land of “milk and honey.” God had preserved and protected them.

You must make a choice today. Will you serve gods of pleasure, money or things? I pray, dear reader, that you will choose to serve the Creator of heaven and earth. I exhort you to choose Jesus Christ as your Savior and today put your faith in Him. Repent of every sin and be baptized (Acts 2:38; 3:19). If you have fallen away from Him, then this day choose to repent and pray (Acts 8:22). Come back and serve Him again. You will be blessed!

Tear Down and Build Up

“That same night the Lord said to him, ‘Take the second bull from your father’s herd, the one seven years old. Tear down your father’s altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build a proper kind of altar to the Lord your God on top of this bluff. Using the wood of the Asherah pole that you cut down, offer the second bull as a burnt offering’” (Judges 6:25,26).

Idolatry is a great evil in the sight of the Lord. Israel, because of this evil, was given into the hands of Midian. They cried out to the Lord for help. God answered their cry by sending a judge-deliverer. His name was Gideon. How did God deliver the Israelites through this man? We know the beautiful story told in Judges 7 when Gideon routed the Midianites with only 300 men. God promised to save Israel and it was done.

Before deliverance there had to be a reformation. Would God save them while they were worshipping Baal? No, there had to be a change. There was a need to repent.

Tear down your father's altar to baal. Was it an easy task? Would all approve of his work? No, is the answer to both questions. In fact, Gideon did the tearing down by night. Evil must be uprooted before we can expect help from God. We too must turn from all sin and then God can save and use us. Brethren, sin must be rebuked. We cannot serve two masters. Can we tolerate fornication? Lying? Hypocrisy? God does not! Every evil must be torn down. Tear down the "altar" of money, possessions, sports and pleasure.

Build up the altar of God. Tearing down the old evil is not enough. In the place of the old, something new must be built. The true altar must be erected. The true sacrifice must be offered. Gideon complied and was blessed by God. God used him to free Israel from the Midianites. Brethren, let us build the "altar" of God. Our God is spirit. To please Him we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. He can see when we play the hypocrite. He has instructed us how to worship Him. Let us build our altars today according to His instruction as found in His Word, the Bible. There can be no salvation without our adoration and honor to God in the manner He has commanded. God cannot use us to save others from sin when we fail to build an "altar" to the Lord.

Teach Us What We Shall Do for the Child

“Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘O my Lord, please let the man of God whom you sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born’” (Judges 13:8, NIV).

A child was promised by God to Manoah and his wife. She was barren, but God said, *“You will conceive and bear a son”* Judges 13:3b. What great and wonderful news! When Manoah’s wife told her husband the news, Manoah prayed to God that they might be taught what they should do for this child. My, how we need such an attitude today! Let us look at five things today in the training of children.

Children need training. They do not grow into godly individuals by chance or accident. **They must be trained.** Example is wonderful and necessary, but there must be more. Children must be taught the word of God daily. Make sure that our children hear about God, Jesus and His church every day.

The training of children must begin early. Do not postpone this training. If a child can learn a language by age two, then he can learn many things about God and Jesus Christ. Every day you delay makes it that much harder to train the child.

The supreme end of the training of children should be to fit them for the service of God. Manoah needed information. Samson would be born into their family. Children are gifts from God. Children must be taught to serve Him. Do they know His

commandments? Do they know of God's great love? They will not, unless we parents teach them.

The chief responsibility of the training of children rests with parents. Elders are to train. Preachers can help. Bible class teachers must do their part, but **parents** have the chief responsibility. You cannot delegate that work to someone else.

Guidance for the training of children must be sought from God. Manoah and his wife asked for guidance from God. God heard their prayer and answered, telling them what to do. Dads, pray to God for guidance. Moms, do the same. Search His word and see what the Bible says about training children. **Teach them each day! Make sure they are present for every Bible class and period of worship at the church building.** Pray to God that you will do this for your children and their eternity.

God Struck Him

"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:6,7).

The ark of God had been captured by the Philistines. Wherever the ark was carried in that land, trouble came to those cities. Finally the decision was made to return the ark of God on a cart drawn by oxen. The men of Beth Shemesh were struck by God because they dared look into the ark of God (1 Samuel 6:19).

God had given strict instructions concerning the holy items. Not even the Levites were to look on the holy things which included the ark of God (Numbers 4:20).

Now David wanted the ark brought up from the house of Abinadab to the city of Jerusalem. Thus they set the ark of God on a new cart with Ahio and Uzzah driving the cart with the ark. When they came to the threshing floor the oxen stumbled and Uzzah put out his hand and touched the ark of God. Did he have good intentions? No doubt he did. However, he touched that which was **holy**. He disobeyed God. He was punished by death.

Israel had forgotten the instructions of God about how the ark was to be moved from place to place. It was to be carried by Levites on poles (Exodus 25:12-15; 37:1-5). Or perhaps they wanted to be like the Philistines who sent the ark back to Israel on a new cart. Maybe they failed to think God's strict instructions were important. Death was the result. Yes, Uzzah was wrong, but so were the Israelites. In fact, David became angry "*because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzzah*" (verse 8).

Three months passed and David saw that the house of Obed-Edom was blessed because of the ark of God. This time the ark was carried by the Levites as instructed by God (1 Chronicles 15:13). The ark was brought safely to Jerusalem with gladness. What a happy day as David and the people praised God and offered sacrifices.

Are there some lessons for us today? Yes!

1. Disobedience to God's instructions leads to destruction.
2. God does punish people when they sin.
3. God's people are not always pleased with what God

does, but God is always right.

4. When God's people neglect the instructions of God and then finally return and serve Him as instructed, then joy is the result.

Brethren, let us heed God's instructions in our worship, service and way of life. We bring dishonor to our God when we neglect to worship Him as directed. Man's way never pleases our God. He is the **Great I Am. He is God!** We are His creatures and must serve Him as He directs. Failure means death and destruction.

Is There No God in Israel?

"Then he said to him, 'Thus says the Lord: Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore, you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die'" (2 Kings 1:16).

Ahaziah, the son of the wicked King Ahab, became king over Israel and Samaria. We learn of his character and life in 1 Kings 22:52,53. *"He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; for he served Baal and worshipped him and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger, according to all his father had done."*

Yes, Ahaziah learned well the life style of his parents. **He**

did evil in the sight of the Lord! He walked in the way of Ahab and Jezebel, his parents!

He also walked in the way of Jeroboam who set up idols in Dan and Bethel.

Now it came to pass that this king took a fall through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and he was injured. Ahaziah then sent messengers to Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to find out if he would recover from his injury. An angel of God instructed Elijah to meet the messengers sent by the king with this message. *“You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die”* (2 Kings 1:4).

When the king heard this message and learned that Elijah was the prophet who had given the message he sent a captain and fifty men to capture Elijah. Elijah called down fire from heaven and consumed the soldiers. Another group was sent and they, too, were destroyed by fire. When the third captain and his men came they pleaded for their lives. Their lives were spared and the message of verse 16 was sent to the King again. Verse 17 reads, *“So Ahaziah died, according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.”*

What lessons can we learn?

1. That children tend to follow the life style of parents.
2. There was and still is a **great** God.
3. His word cannot be broken or successfully opposed.
Let us learn these lessons today and serve the God of heaven.

He Charged Not God Foolishly

Many good lessons can be learned from Job. To hear some of us talk today, you would think that we live far more perfectly than those of yesteryear. However, is this true? How many of us can measure up to the stature of Job?

God granted Satan power to test Job. Satan told God that Job had a hedge built around him and that God had blessed him abundantly. Satan said, *"If you will allow me to remove what he has, then Job will curse you."* The permission was granted (Job 1:9-12).

Job's possessions and children were destroyed. The Sabeans killed the oxen and asses of Job. Fire destroyed the sheep and the servants. The Chaldeans carried away Job's camels and slew the servants caring for them. Then came the destruction of all of Job's children. All of this happened in one day.

Job resigned himself to God's will. When he heard all of this he worshipped God. *"And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly"* (Job 1:21,22).

Beware, lest we charge God foolishly. Do we blame God for the mistakes we make? Do we realize we are the creatures of God and not the creator? Do difficulty and misfortune strength-

en us? Do we charge God foolishly? (charge God with wrong, NKJV)

Job set a good example for all to follow.

Curse God and Die!

"Then his wife said to him, Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9).

Not all advice or every command found in the Bible should be obeyed. In the verse cited above we have the foolish words of Mrs. Job. She saw the horrible suffering of her husband. God allowed Satan to strike Job *"with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head"* (Job 2:7b). His suffering was enormous. Job, however, **did not** accept the advice of his wife. *"You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and shall we not accept adversity?"* (Job 2:10).

Satan, or the serpent, lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden when he said she would not die if she ate of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden. The woman knew the truth, but she obeyed Satan's lie. Saul commanded that the priests should be slain for helping David, but his command should not have been obeyed (1 Samuel 22).

Look carefully at the command or advice. Ask some very important questions.

1. Who gave the commandment? Was it given by Satan? Then reject it. Was it given by one following the devil? Beware

of such advice or commands. If God gave the command, heed it.

2. To whom was the command given? Noah was commanded to build an ark. Are we to build an ark also? No! Abraham was told to leave his family and country. Are you packed and ready to go? No, it was a command of God but given to one man. The children of Israel were told to offer animal sacrifices, but we have the perfect sacrifice in Jesus and we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

Advice abounds today, but only the commands of Jesus will produce life more abundantly.

"The thief only comes to kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life more abundantly" (John 10:10).

"Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter into heaven's kingdom, but the one who does the will of my heavenly Father" (Matthew 7:21).

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized (immersed) shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16).

Have you heeded the command of Jesus and been baptized?

Who Dwells with God?

"Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? (Psalm 15:1).

What does God require of those who will enter into the place

of worship? Who can dwell with God? Are there requirements set forth in Scripture? Yes, they are seen in verses 2-5 in Psalm 15. Yes, we can have fellowship with God and enjoy his protection.

1. Those who walk uprightly or whose walk is blameless. People who are sound, innocent and have integrity.
2. Those who do what is right. Those who work righteousness. Those are people who obey God's commands.
3. Those who speak the truth from their hearts. They are faithful and reliable. Their attitudes are correct for they always speak the truth.
4. Those who do not backbite with their tongues. They are not guilty of slander. They do not gather up tales to discredit others.
5. Those who do no evil to their neighbors. They seek to do good and not evil.
6. Those who do not take up reproaches against their friends. They cast no slurs on others.
7. Those who do not despise vile conduct cannot enter. The people of integrity stand opposed to reprobates.
8. Those who honor those who fear the Lord. What a blessing when we find people who fear God and do His will. They should be honored!
9. Those who keep their promises even when it hurts.
10. Those who do not charge usury or exorbitant interest.
11. Those who do not accept bribes against the innocent.

They do not deprive the innocent people of their rights.
People are far more important than wealth.

Let us take a good look at our lives. Will we dwell with God forever? Will He accept our worship of Him? *“He who does these things shall never be moved”* (Psalm 15:5b).

Our Refuge and Strength

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Psalm 46:1,2).

God is our refuge, strength and help! Never forget this great truth! He is the place of safety. God is the best defense; He is the only true defender. In Him we have peace and safety. It matters not how many security systems we may install, not one can compare with being safe in the Lord. What about Satan? When we abide in God, the devil cannot reach us. When sickness arrives or death darkens our homes, God is the refuge.

God is our strength. We admire the strength of weight lifters. In Africa I have seen mighty bull elephants shake giant trees. What strength! But how puny that strength is compared to that of God. I am weak, but God is strong. Why should we fear what man may do to us? Our strength is in the Lord God. Jesus said He had been given all authority or power both in heaven and on earth in Matthew 28:18. Will He fail to give us the needed strength? No! He will not fail to strengthen us by His might (Ephesians 3:16). When tempted, He will not allow you to be

tempted beyond what you and I can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God is our help. He is there to help in time of trouble. When my health fails, He is there. When I have an economic problem, He is there to supply all my needs. I do not fight Satan alone. If God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31). Yes, we lack, but God supplies. He knows our every need and supplies those needs richly. *“My God will supply your every need, according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

There, we will not fear! Do you see the confidence and trust David had in God? Yes, the earth might be removed and the mountains cast into the sea, but the Psalmist would not fear. He knew that God was his strength, refuge and hope. The Hebrew author wrote, *“Do not be greedy, but be content with what you have, for He Himself has promised, ‘I will never leave you and I will never forsake you!’ Therefore, we may boldly say, ‘The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid! What will man do to me?’”*

Let us thank our God for His care and protection daily!

How Can a Young Man Keep His Way Pure?

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word” (Psalm 119).

The question is very important. How can a young man keep his way pure? It is true that we live in a wicked world.

Peter said, *"Be saved from this crooked generation"* (Acts 2:40). Paul wrote, *"No one is righteous, not even one"* (Romans 3:10). *"Their feet are swift to pour out blood"* (Romans 3:15). A long list of sins is set forth in Romans 1, stating that the people have refused to have God in their knowledge.

"They have filled themselves with all wrongdoing, wickedness, greed, and malice. They are full of hate, envy, murder, strife, deceit, and meanness. They are gossipers, slanderers, haters of God, obnoxious, arrogant, boasters, planners of the vile things, disobedient to parents. They are senseless, disloyal, inhuman, and unmerciful. They, knowing the judgment of God that they who practice such things deserve death, not only do them, but even approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:29-32, McCord).

Does Paul give a description of the present day world? Read your daily paper. What is happening? Rape of a 10 year-old-girl. Murder of a 14-year-old girl. School children shot and killed by fellow students. **Why? Why?** We have left God out of our knowledge. How can we help our children keep their way pure? That was a good question 3000 years ago and still is a good question today.

The answer of God must be heeded. We must live according to God's word! He is the creator. He knows what makes us "tick." What have we done? We have excluded Him from our schools. We have excluded Him from our homes. We have also banished Him from the church. But you say, "How?" We have allowed a small percent of the population to banish the Bible from the classrooms. This year I attended a baccalaureate service and not once did I hear the word "God." No prayers were offered. I could hardly believe my ears.

How have we banished God from our homes? We have made no provision for a daily time when we sit with our children and let God speak to them from the Bible. We have become so wrapped up in making money, buying, going places and watching sports that we have left out God. We do the same thing with the church. Parents, I beg of you to make certain your children are in Bible class and worship every time the church doors are opened. Tell the elders that you are ready to teach at any time. This is not just a parent problem. It is a matter of life and death. Let us all put a stop to the work of Satan and help our young men and women keep their lives pure.

Ezra's Resolutions

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

The Jews were able to return to Jerusalem from Babylon. The temple was to be rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem were to be rebuilt. Ezra, who was a skilled scribe of the Law of Moses, returned with a great purpose. There was to be a great restoration of the worship and service to God. How was this to be done? Three steps are given in the verse above.

Ezra prepared his heart. One can do little for the Lord if his heart is not prepared. His heart was prepared to seek the law of the Lord. The Scriptures (law of the Lord) can make one wise unto salvation. The Lord God does have a law and it is vital that all know that law. Ignorance does not bring salvation. It is sad,

but true, that the knowledge of the word of God is so small in those who claim to be teachers. Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. Nothing would deter him in this great task.

Ezra did it. What did he do? He was obedient to the law of the Lord. One cannot obey what one does not know, but how sad when people know the will of God, but fail to live according to those holy precepts. What good is knowledge of God and His will if I fail to live up to those teachings. Jesus said that it is not those who say, "Lord, Lord," but those who **do** His will who will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21). What a blessing to the hearers when the teacher knows and does the will of God!

Ezra taught the statutes and commandments. He was not selfish. His desire was for Israel to know the commandments of God. He was a great teacher because he had a life of submission to God and His statutes. There is a solemn obligation upon all who learn truth to take that truth to others who do not know.

Conclusion: May I encourage all to learn from Ezra. Let us resolve that we will prepare our hearts to seek the law of the Lord. Let us resolve to do the will of the Lord. Let us resolve to teach this message of God to others. All will be blessed and glory will be given to God.

I Will Praise Your Name

"O Lord, You are my God, I will exalt you; I will praise Your name, for you have done wonderful things. Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth" (Isaiah 25:1).

Let the Lord be praised! He is Lord of Lords and Kings of Kings. *“This the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, will display at the proper time”* (1 Timothy 6:15). Is God your Lord? Do you let the Lord rule your life? Submit to Him today and you will be blessed. Thomas did not believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead until he saw the nail prints and the wound in the side of Jesus. He then made this statement, *“My Lord and My God”* (John 20:28).

Let us exalt and praise the Lord! This is done with the words we sing and pray. The Hebrew author makes an excellent exhortation in 13:15, *“By Him let us continually offer up the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips, confessing His name.”* Peter writes, *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people for God’s own possession; that you might declare the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”* (1 Peter 2:9). Exalt Him by a godly, holy life. Praise Him when the church assembles and when you are in your home. He is worthy to be praised!

He has done wonderful things!

- A. He created the world and man (Genesis 1).
- B. He saved Noah and his family in the great flood (Genesis 7).
- C. He saved Israel from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12-13).
- D. He gave the Israelites the land of Canaan, (The Book of Joshua)
- E. He gave His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- F. He raised Jesus from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

G. He gave us a way to be saved (John 14:6; Mark 16:16)

The counsel of God is faithful and true! The God of heaven is a faithful God. He is a God in whom we can trust. His sayings or laws we can trust. They are truth. Listen to the words of Jesus spoken to His Father in John 17:17, *“Set them apart in the truth; Your teaching is truth”*. This truth of God can set man free from sin. *“And you will know the truth, and the truth will free you”* (John 8:32). This truth must be obeyed to enjoy the purifying of our souls. *“Since you have purified you souls in obeying the truth, love one another fervently from a pure heart in sincere brotherly affection”* (1 Peter 1:22). Let us rejoice in the God of our salvation. Let us praise Him daily. Let us tell others of this God and of His Son Jesus Christ.

I Will Defend! I Will Save!

“For I will defend this city, to save it for my own sake and for my servant David’s sake” (Isaiah 37:35).

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, demanded the surrender of Jerusalem. It is true that he had been very successful in defeating other cities and nations. He taunted the rulers and people of the city with the following words: *“I say you speak of having counsel and strength for war; but they are vain words, now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me?”* (Isaiah 36:5). Had the gods of other nations protected them from Assyria? No, they had not been able to deliver them.

Now the questions come, "Will the God of Israel be able to deliver them? Will He save them? Will He defend them against this powerful enemy?" Hezekiah, the king, was wise. He prayed to the Lord of Hosts. He concluded his prayer with these words, *"Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord, You alone"* (Isaiah 37:20). What a prayer! What faith!

The answer of God came through His prophet Isaiah. It was God who allowed the king of Assyria to conquer others. Would this God allow Sennacherib to defeat Israel and capture Jerusalem? He would not! Look at the first verse quoted above, *"I will defend this city and save it."* Did He do this? That very night the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrians. The king of Assyria departed, returned home and was killed by his sons.

Saints of God, we still have this powerful God to defend and save us today. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. With every temptation there is a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). To those who are weary and burdened, He invites us to come to Him for rest, *"Come to me, all of you who are struggling and are yet burdened, and I will refresh you"* (Matthew 11:28). We are to cast every care on the Lord for He cares for us. *"Cast all your worry upon Him because He is concerned about you"* (1 Peter 5:7). James gives us the proper solution, *"Be submissive therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you"* (James 4:7,8). Will you not allow this powerful God to defend and save you? Then submit to Him. Put your faith in God. Repent of every sin. Confess Jesus Christ as His Son. Be buried in the waters of baptism. Then live faithfully to this God until death!

Separated from God!

“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1,2).

The children of Israel had returned from exile but they were experiencing affliction and calamity. What was the problem? Why were they being given no help?

The problem was not an impotent God. Yes, some indicated that God was the problem. Has the Lord’s hand become so short that it can no longer save us? Has God become deaf? Can He no longer hear us? Where has God gone? He is so far away? Perhaps a good question to ask is this. If God seems far away, who moved?

The problem was sin. Israel had allowed iniquity to enter. They were living lawless lives. They were breaking God’s commands. Their hands were filled with blood, verse 3. They were conceiving evil and bringing forth iniquity. Thus God could have no fellowship with such people. God had hidden His face from them. This was His way to show His disapproval. His arm could have saved them. He could have heard their cries, but **sin** had made a separation.

Sin remains the problem today. What are the sins we see today which separate men from God? The same ones that kept Israel from receiving blessings from God over 2,000 years ago. Paul calls these sins “works of the flesh.” *“The works of the flesh are well known, which are fornication, impurity, sensuality, idol-*

atry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, wraths, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envies, instances of drunkenness, rev-elries, and such like; of which things I tell you beforehand, even as I told you previously, that those who practice such things shall not inherit God's kingdom" (Galatians 5:19-21).

Dear reader, look into your own life. Are you separated from God? You are, if sin is in your life. I beg you to repent! Turn from sin today. If you have never obeyed the gospel, then believe in Jesus Christ, leave every sin, confess His name before men and be baptized. Only Christ can reconcile you to God (Colossians 1:22). If you have become a Christian, but have fallen back into sin, repent. Confess your wrong-doings and pray to God, (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:8-2:1). He will forgive those who obey Him.

Amend Your Ways!

"Now, therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; then the Lord will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you" (Jeremiah 26:13).

God had sent Jeremiah. *"Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people saying, 'The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard'"* (Jeremiah 26:12). Some complain when they hear the message of God, "Why such a tough message?" "Can't you preach something positive?" A true servant of God must preach the truth of God. He must speak the message of salvation. All men are sinners. Thus all men are lost and need repentance.

Men can be saved through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). We need not apologize for preaching the truth. Only the truth can set men free (John 8:32).

The message was that Judah must repent. That was not a popular sermon. In fact, the priests and prophets said that Jeremiah deserved to die (Jeremiah 26:11). The solution to the sin problem is not to kill the prophet or evangelist. We do not usually kill our preachers, but we do “send them on their way” if they preach lessons that hurt our life styles. Can a doctor be a good doctor and ignore disease in your body? The treatment may be painful and costly, but health is better than death. Let us thank God for those who tell us we should amend our ways. **“Obey the voice of the Lord”** should ring out from the pulpits today!

Repentance is a New Testament doctrine. *“No, I assure you, but unless you change your hearts (repent), all of you will likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).

“Peter said to them, change your hearts (repent), and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Paul said, *“God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now He orders all men everywhere to change their hearts (repent), since He has appointed a day in which He will righteously judge the world by that man whom he has appointed; and He has given assurance to everyone by raising Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30,31).

Have you repented (changed your heart) of every sin?

Burned the House of the Lord

"He burned the house of the Lord and the King's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great man, he burned with fire" (Jeremiah 52:13).

Nebuzardan, captain of the guard, not only destroyed the temple, but the houses of the important people were reduced to ashes. Solomon had built this beautiful temple. It was the pride of the Jews, but now it was no more. Judah was defeated by the army of Babylon. Why? The answer is quite simple. The people of God had sinned. They had been warned again and again, but now the city was burned and the people were carried away into captivity. The sacred vessels of this temple were carried to Babylon. It was a sad picture.

My brothers, what about the temple of God today? Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's spirit lives in you? *"If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are his temple"* (1 Corinthians 3:16,17). Is not the church God's temple today? How we need to give proper care for this temple! No, we would not think of burning down a church building, but perhaps the temple of God is being destroyed in other ways.

It is being neglected. We have little or no time to keep our appointments with God. Am I always present each time the people of God gather around the table of the Lord? Or do I neglect this opportunity to remember His death and suffering? Am I

present for Bible study Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights or have I neglected this opportunity? Neglect is dangerous. Judah had neglected to serve God and thus God allowed the beautiful temple to be burned. Brothers, let us not destroy the temple of God through neglect.

It is being defiled. When men introduce the teachings and doctrines of man, then the church is contaminated. It is no longer pure. Jesus said that the worship becomes vain when we introduce the commandments of men, *"In vain they worship me, teaching as precepts the commandments of men"* (Mark 7:7). Where in the Bible do you read about keeping **Easter** or **Christmas** as special days of worship of God? When we bring men's teachings into the temple of God the worship is of no value and we defile the temple of God.

Yes, even those persons who serve in God's temple are to be pure. Have we not attempted to defile God's temple when we change the terms of admission given in the Scripture? "We recommend baptism, but it is not necessary to be saved." Jesus bought the church with his blood (Acts 20:28). Only those who have reached His blood can serve faithfully in His temple! We reach the blood when we are baptized into Christ and into His death. *"Do you not know that as many of us as were immersed (baptized) into Christ Jesus were immersed (baptized) into His death"* (Romans 6:3). Let us heed His word by keeping His temple holy.

They Show Much Love

"So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as

my people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them, for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain” (Ezekiel 33:31).

They hear your words! The people of God sat before the prophet Ezekiel to hear his words. His words were from God. *“Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord”* (verse 30b). How important and necessary it is to come and hear the words of the Lord. No one can live a holy upright life without a knowledge of what God says. Ignorance does not save. *“God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now He orders all men everywhere to change their hearts, since He has appointed a day in which He will righteously judge the world by that man whom He has appointed; and He has given assurance to everyone by raising Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30,31).

They do not do them! Truly these are sad words. The house of Israel heard the words of God. The knowledge had been imparted. That was a step in the right direction. Can knowledge without action save one? Can the liar be saved without stopping his lying? Can the drunkard go to heaven without ceasing his drinking? There are things man must not do. There are actions man must take to be saved. Hearing without doing is futile. *“But be doers of the message, not hearers only, misleading yourselves”* (James 1:22).

They show much love! *“Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them”* (verse 32). Yes, they even invited people to come and hear the words of the prophet Ezekiel. Come and hear! Our prophet has a lovely voice. His message is like a lovely song. This reminds us of the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:1-8. Why do you

give to a needy person? Why do you blow a trumpet when you give a gift? Why do you pray on the street corners? Why do you make long prayers? It was a “show” to be seen of men.

Their hearts pursue their own gain! They had a heart problem. Their affections were centered on other things. They were trusting in the visible wealth and not on the invisible God of heaven. They knew wealth or money would bring luxury, ease and the satisfaction of the sensuous pleasures. Their eagerness for worldly gain caused the words of the prophet of God to be choked. No fruit was borne. They obeyed not. *“And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful”* (Mark 4:19).

Let us heed the words of God today by being obedient while there is time!

My People Are Destroyed

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hosea 4:6).

Hosea was a prophet of God who prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam about 750 B.C. Israel was guilty of whoredom as she prostituted herself before the Baalim of the land. The nation morally was in decay. Hosea set forth God’s love for Israel, but he also said the nation was doomed without repentance. The peo-

ple were religiously ignorant. What happens when people are ignorant of God and His word?

Religious ignorance is destructive. Ignorance is not the mother of devotion; it is the mother of destruction. This ignorance destroys the growth of the soul. No fruit is brought forth because there is no knowledge. Just as the lack of moisture means the death of plants, so the soul that knows not God will die! They did not know the God of heaven nor His holy will. What a sad picture.

Religious ignorance is willful. The Israelites had chosen to reject knowledge of the God of heaven and His will for man. They had been given the law through the prophet Moses. It is hard to believe and understand such a decision. To forget or ignore His will means death.

Religious ignorance offends God. The people had rejected knowledge and God rejected them as His people. Could there be a more dismal picture? Not only would God reject these people, but He would also reject their children. The priests had not taught the word and the people had no interest in knowing God. Doom was certain. *“And it will be like people, like priest. So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds. For they shall eat, but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase; because they have ceased obeying the Lord”* (Hosea 4:9,10).

My fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, will you not heed what God says to us today? Have we not rejected the knowledge of God and His will by neglect? In what ways has this happened? Too few take the time to feed on God's word every Sunday morning at Bible study time. Some do come Sunday morning for worship, but most never make it back Sunday night and Wednesday.

It is hard for me to comprehend how we want knowledge of politics, economics and all sorts of earthly wisdom, but ignore God and His Word. We make sure our children go to school each day, but could really care less that they are taught His word daily.

Brethren, this is **willful sin!** Wake up! Be serious. You are playing with the souls of your loved ones. Just as God rejected Israel so He will reject us today who choose ignorance!

Weeping for the Children

“A voice in Ramah was heard, weeping and terrible mourning. Rachel weeping for her children, and she was refusing to be comforted, because they are not”
(Matthew 2:18).

The command of Herod was that all the boys in Bethlehem and the surrounding region up to two years of age were to be killed. He was ruthless and jealous and sought to eliminate any rivals for the kingship. The wise men had come to worship the king of the Jews and thus Herod sought to kill this newborn king. My, how Rachel must have wept that day as infants were snatched and killed. Such a king as Herod was not fit to live!

Last week we saw mothers and fathers weeping for their children in Colorado. Yes, we saw and heard brothers and sisters and classmates pour forth tears and words of sorrow. How could this happen? Why did these young men take the lives of thirteen others in addition to their own? I thought several times about my high school years at Liberty Memorial High School in Lawrence, Kansas, in the late forties. Were any of my classmates killed by

fellow students? Did anyone ever bring guns and bombs into that school building? What has happened to our nation the last fifty years? The killing in Colorado is only one of many to take place the last few years. Will it happen again? I would like to think that it will not, but my opinion is that it will happen again until we as a people make some big changes.

Can a solution be found? Yes, I believe we can stop such carnage. It will not stop in a day, week or month, but we can make a beginning. Here are my suggestions to change the picture.

Parents! Teach the children about God and His Son Jesus Christ. Do not let one day pass without opening the Word of God and reading that word to your children. Man is made in God's image and when you shed blood, then you shed the blood of one who was made in the image of God. Parents, stop allowing sports, recreation and part time jobs be the priority in the lives of your children. You must make sure that every time the church building doors are open for Bible study and worship, you are there with your children. Let them see that you **walk the walk** of Christ and not just **talk**. Know your children. Spend time with them. What do they see on TV? What do they listen to on their radios and CD's? What about the internet? God gave you children to shape and mold. Don't let Satan destroy your children.

Church! Help parents. Make available every resource possible to help them rear their children to be faithful children of God. It is time the church awakened to the fact that we, as the church, are not there to entertain children. We are there to teach, encourage, rebuke and build up. Elders, preachers, deacons, teachers and every member, we must remember there is a war with Satan. Last week Satan won a battle. Will you weep next week over the loss of your children? Where will your children spend eternity?

Baptize You with the Holy Spirit

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11).

Many honest and sincere people are confused about the Holy Spirit. They think only of the baptism of the Holy Spirit when the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit. Or when the Bible speaks of baptism, many think only of Holy Spirit baptism. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Who was the administrator of Holy Spirit Baptism?

According to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11, it would be Jesus Christ. John 1:33 records the words of John speaking of the Son of God: *"I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit'."* After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus said to His apostles, *"For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5).*

Peter speaks of this baptism when he reports to the disciples of the Lord in Jerusalem after going to the house of Cornelius. *"Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 11:16).* Not one time does the Scripture speak of anyone else but Jesus being able to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Was the baptism of the Holy Spirit a command or a promise?

It was a promise, not a command. It was made by Christ to His apostles that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit *“not many days from now”* (Acts 1:5). Jesus chose these apostles. He commanded them to wait in Jerusalem. They were to be clothed with **power** from on high. *“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, ‘which’, He said, ‘You have heard from Me’”* (Acts 1:4).

The Lord Jesus taught the apostles for three years preparing them for their work of preaching the gospel to the whole world. They would be His witnesses after being endued with power from on high. *“Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49). They were to be witnesses, not to the Holy Spirit, but to be witnesses of Christ. *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

Worship the Lord Your God!

“Then Jesus said to him, Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve’” (Matthew 4:10).

Satan was busy trying to get Jesus to sin. The devil had taken Jesus up to an exceedingly high mountain. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. The devil said, "*All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me*" (v. 9).

Jesus did not give in. Jesus rejected this temptation and refused Satan by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13. God is the **only being** to be worshipped. To God and God alone are we to offer reverence or homage. He must be the recipient of all homage. God forbids the worship of men and angels. What about Satan?

Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of the world. No cross! No shame! No death! You can be a great earthly king, Jesus. You can have it right now. No pain and all gain is the message of the devil. Jesus refused this temptation for He knew the cross was the only way for Him to become a spiritual King.

Today we know this to be true, but how we struggle to put it into practice. Satan still comes with his temptations. Worship me! Serve me! Look at what I will give you and you can have it right now. No pain! Live it up. You worked hard all week. Give yourself a break. Worship God on Sunday? No, that is a day of rest. Wednesday night? Not a chance! You are tired and need to relax. No, you are too busy giving the "finer things" of life to your family to have time to worship God daily in your own home. Your children need time for homework and sports.

I plead with you, dear reader. Don't buy into the propaganda of the **deceiver**. He is a liar. Protect yourself and your family by worshipping and serving God daily. You will be blessed beyond your fondest dreams. You will have the peace that passes understanding. You will be ready to meet your Creator with confidence and anticipation on the judgment day. You must

make the choice. **Worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.**

Nothing to Do?

“There is nothing to do in Topeka but drink and get high,” said a young man quoted in *The Topeka Capital Journal*. Many said the main problem with going out in Topeka is the lack of things to do. Party all night and drink beer. Is it any wonder that people get shot and killed? We live in a time where people think life consists of “having fun.” Brethren, we live in a pagan culture, which only pays lip service to God. “Let it all hang out.” “Do what you like.” Satan is having a wonderful time as he sees boys and girls head down the broad way, which leads to destruction.

“Enter the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the road is spacious that leads to death, and many go that way. But the gate is narrow and the road is restricted that leads into life, and few find it” (Matthew 7:13,14).

Parents, what are we teaching our children? Failure to teach that life is more than just “party time” means we have sinned by being neglectful. Have we failed to teach Ecclesiastes 12:13? *“Let us hear the conclusion of the matter; fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”*

Do our children know God? Do they know His commandments? Do our sons and daughters see us doing God’s will? Do they see us loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? It will be difficult for young people to do right by serv-

ing God when they do not have good examples set before them.

Nothing to do? For starters, practice what Jesus said in Matthew 25. *“I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you received me; naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me”* (verses 35, 36).

When we serve the least of the brothers of Jesus, we have served the king, Jesus Christ. Thank God that one great way we can serve Him is by serving others.

God's Plan of Salvation

1. Realize you are a sinner.
2. Ask God to forgive you of your sins.
3. Believe in Jesus alone for salvation
4. Invite Jesus into your heart as Savior and Lord.

This is the plan of God for salvation as written by Tim VanderZwaag with Anthony Barber in the May, 1998, issue of *Christian News Messenger* page 12.

Why is it so difficult for men to read, understand and teach the true plan of God for salvation? Has Satan blinded their eyes? Men have laid aside the commandments of God in order to keep their own traditions and teachings. Such practices make our worship and service to God vain. Read Matthew 15:1-9.

What does the Bible teach on this subject? First, let us look at what Jesus commanded His apostles in Mark 16:16, *“He who*

believes and is immersed (baptized) shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned." Where did Jesus place salvation? After belief and immersion. Was the Son of God wrong? Did He command something contrary to God's plan? **No! No!** Why then did the people noted above leave out baptism or immersion?

Next, let us look at the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter proclaimed, *"Therefore, let all the house of Israel know certainly that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ"* (v. 36). What was the response of the people to this declaration by Peter? *"They heard this and were stabbed in their heart and cried out to Peter and the other apostles, 'Men, brothers, what should we do?'"* Did they believe the message of Peter concerning Jesus Christ? **Yes!** Did they understand they were living in sin? **Yes!** They were stabbed in their heart.

Now consider Peter's answer to their request, *"What should we do?"* *"Change your hearts (repent) and let each one of you be immersed (baptized) in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (v. 38). Was Peter wrong? Did he teach the plan of God? Yes, he did. He had been taught by Jesus for three years. He was guided by the Holy Spirit. He gave two commands to those believers. **Repent and be baptized!**

Why were these two vital commands left out? Maybe they do not know God's commands to the alien sinner or maybe they just do not care. Jesus said, *"If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit"* (Matthew 15:14). Why did they leave out confessing Jesus as God's Son? *"Everyone who acknowledges (confesses) me in the presence of men, I will acknowledge (confess) him in the presence of my heavenly Father"* (Matthew 10:32).

It is time we all went back to the Bible and learned the teachings of God. Then obey these teachings and teach them to others.

Whose Church?

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

People today are very loose in the way they speak of the church. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was very precise when He spoke of the church to His disciples. Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. He was and He still is the Son of the living God. Thousands, even millions, will verbalize that this is true. However, few seem to know much about the church. What does Scripture tell about the church?

That Jesus promised to build the church. He not only made the promise, but about six months later the church was built by Jesus. That building took place on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His ascension back to heaven. On that day three thousand people gladly received the word of God through Peter and they were baptized (Acts 2:41). The church was built by Jesus. Today we have scores, yes thousands, of churches but they were not built by Jesus Christ.

That Jesus promised to build only one church. Look again at our text, *“I will build my church.”* Not churches! **One!** Singular! “Oh! How narrow-minded can you be?” These are the words of many today. My friend, the church of Jesus is wide

enough to accommodate all who will surrender their lives to Him in obedience to the gospel. When that happens the Lord Jesus will add those people to this one church (Acts 2:47).

That Jesus is the owner of this church. *“I will build my church.”* Look at the word “my.” He is the owner! Jesus paid for the church with His precious blood. *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28). As owner, He directs all the work of His church. He, as owner and head, directs the terms of entrance into the church. He, as owner, demands that we deny self and follow Him daily. As owner, He directs the way we are to worship Him. As owner, He commands us to teach (disciple) all the nations.

I know the religious world is confused because too few ever go back to the Scriptures. Even more are confused because they listen to “blind guides” and thus fall into the “ditch.” Others could care less because they think they own the church. Let us honor Christ Jesus as the builder and owner of His one church.

Deny Whom?

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me’” (Matthew 16:24).

We must have a desire to follow Jesus. Too many of us are too busy thinking like the world. Look at the verses just before the one quoted above. Jesus had told His disciples that He would

be killed and the third day He would rise from the dead (verse 21). Peter takes the Lord aside and rebukes the Son of God. However, Jesus turns to Peter and said, *"You get behind me, Satan. You are a cause of stumbling to me, because you are not **thinking** about the things of God, but the things of men"* (verse 23). We wonder why we have many names on the church roll, but so few have a real desire or wish to follow Jesus. They or we are too busy, like Peter, thinking about the things of men.

We must deny self! Not just on Sunday, but I must deny myself every day. Every moment of the day you and I must deny self. Self can no longer be the dominant one in our lives. The Lord has to become number one. It is not hard to be immersed (baptized) in water, but there is no salvation without a denial of self.

We must take up the cross. Following Jesus Christ is a life of serving others. Personal ambitions and desires must be abandoned. Brethren, we have become so saturated with the world that we have turned the "cross" into an ornament worn around the neck. **No! No!** The **cross** meant **death**. *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2:20). Brothers, look in your closets and dig out the cross. Take it up daily.

We must follow Jesus. Some questions for us may help. If Jesus lived in Kansas today, where would He be on Sunday morning? Sunday night? Wednesday night? Would He have time to speak words of encouragement on Monday? Tuesday? Daily? Would He ever speak about salvation to His workmates? What kind of language would He use? Would He have time to pray daily? What kind of employee would He be? When He worked as a carpenter, would His products have been the best?

The scripture is plain. **Follow Jesus!** When we deny ourselves, my fellow Saints, we will be abundantly blessed here and in eternity.

I Do Not Know

I do not know the day my Lord Jesus Christ will return. *“On account of this, you also stay ready, because the Son of man comes in an hour you do not expect”* (Matthew 24:44). Yes, I hear people say He will come on New Year’s Day. Could be. Others say it will be in the year 2000. It could be, but I do not know when He will return to take His own. I do know **He will come back**. This is the promise of the word.

“Do not let your heart be disturbed; you believe in God, believe in Me also. There are many rooms in My Father’s house. If this were not true, I would have told you, because I go to make a place ready for you, and if I go and make a place ready for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that you also may be where I am going” (John 14:1-3).

“And said, ‘Men of Galilee, why are you standing and peering into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:11).

Since I do not know when He will return, but I am certain He will return, the only solution is to **be ready**. When? Every day. Every hour.

I also do not know the day I am going to die. God has grant-

ed me life for over 67 years, but I do not know when death will make its call. *“And as it is appointed for men once to die, and judgment after this, so Christ also, once offered to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time without sin, to those awaiting Him for salvation”* (Hebrews 9:27,28).

Since I do know I will die, but I do not know when I will die, what should I do? I must be prepared for the call of death. I always enjoy reading of the attitude of Paul concerning death. *“I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my death is near, I have fought a noble fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Therefore, a crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord the righteous judge, will give to me in that day; yet not to me only, but also to all those who love His appearance”* (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Now, my friends, do you know when the Lord will return? Do you know when you will die? You and I must have the same solution to death and the coming of the Lord. **Be ready!** What a terrible shame to be unprepared when Jesus made salvation possible for all. I exhort all of us to prepare today. Read Acts 2:36-38; 8:22-24.

Those Who Were Ready

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut” (Matthew 25:10).

I often wonder why people fail to prepare for the coming of the Lord. Why do so few really prepare for death? No, I am not

talking about the funeral arrangements, burial plot and the preacher. I am speaking about the small number who are READY to meet the Lord. Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of heaven. There were ten virgins.

These virgins were alike in some respects.

1. Each one was a virgin.
2. Each one had a lamp.
3. Each planned to meet the bridegroom.
4. They all slumbered and slept.
5. All ten heard the message, "*Behold, the bridegroom is coming*" (v. 6).
6. All ten arose and trimmed their lamps.

These virgins were different.

1. Five were wise and five were foolish.
2. The foolish took no oil in their lamps, whereas the wise took oil.
3. Five went to buy oil after the cry was made concerning the coming of the bridegroom.
4. Five were ready for his coming with sufficient oil.
5. Five were ready and five were not.
6. Five entered the house for the wedding and five did not.
7. The Lord knew five, but to those unprepared He said, "*I do not know you*" (v. 12).

You who have never been obedient to the gospel: what is your problem? Christ died for you. Christ Jesus has given you a

way to have every sin removed (Acts 2:38) You who have never believed, repented of every sin and been baptized are **lost**. You are not ready. You are like the five foolish virgins. The Lord will deny you entrance.

To you who have wandered away from the Lord: You have allowed the world to take over your life once more. Your present condition is worse than it was before you became a Christian. Unfaithful children of God will be denied entrance. Yes, you can knock and plead, but your pleas will fall on deaf ears. *"I do not know you."* What is the solution? Prepare by repenting and praying today (Acts 8:22-24). Only those who are ready can enter with Christ to the wedding.

Vain Worship

"In vain they worship me, teaching as precepts the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah in His message to the Jews from Jerusalem. Yes, the Jews in the days of Isaiah were guilty of worshipping God with their lips, but not their hearts. They made a terrible error by worshipping according to the commandments of men.

What is worship? The Greek word translated worship in Mark is *sebomai*. It means "stand in awe, to venerate, reverence, worship and adore." Two other passages using the same word are, *"They exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, and worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen"* (Romans 1:25). *"As I was walking*

about, noticing your places of **worship**. I found an altar with this inscription, **TO AN UNKNOWN GOD**. I introduce to you this one whom you **worship** without clear knowledge” (Acts 17:23).

What or who is the object of your worship? Jesus answers this question in His contest with the devil, “Further, the devil took Him to the top of a very high mountain and showed Him all the world’s kingdoms and their glory and said, ‘I will give you all these things if you will fall down and **worship** me.’ Jesus answered ‘Go away, Satan, for it is written, ‘You shall **worship** the Lord our God, and you shall serve Him only’” (Matthew 4:8-10).

What does the word “vain” mean? It comes from the Greek word *matan* which means “in vain, fruitlessly, without profit.” Two other passages which use this word are, “and again, ‘The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are **worthless**’” (1 Corinthians 3:20). “And if Christ is not raised, your faith is **vain**, and you are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

What makes worship vain? First, playing the hypocrite, “He answered, Isaiah has prophesied well of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’” (Mark 7:6). Second, “teaching as precepts the commandments of men.” Does that happen today? It does! Look at some modern examples following the precepts of men.

1. The use of instruments of music in worshipping God.
2. Partaking of the Lord’s supper any day of the week.
3. Observing December 25th as the birthday of Jesus Christ.
4. Having praise teams or choirs do the singing for us.

5. Observing Lent.
6. Observing Easter as the resurrection day of the Lord.

Is it not time to get back to the word of God? If we do not, our worship will be worthless.

Good Tidings of Great Joy

“Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Luke 2:10).

What were the good tidings of great joy?

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

“And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

“And we declare to you glad tidings — that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He raised up Jesus” (Acts 13:32, 33).

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

Will these good tidings — the Gospel — save those who do not believe and obey?

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for every one who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

“and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7,8).

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17).

Conclusion:

1. Let us preach these good tidings to every creature. *“And he said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).*
2. Let us encourage those who hear the message to obey. *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).*
3. *“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them saying, Be saved from this perverse generation. Then those who gladly received His word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (Acts 2:40,41).*

You Were Not Willing!

“O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets

and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing" (Luke 13:34).

This was a sad day in the life of Jesus. There are some great things we can learn from these words.

We see the emotions of Jesus. His heart was filled with tender regret. He loved this city. He wanted this city to turn from sin and enjoy salvation. He was pained at their rejection. He saw a city given over to the doctrines and traditions of men.

We see the persistence of God. "*How often I wanted to gather your children together.*" Prophet after prophet had been sent. The message of God had been proclaimed. **Turn from your sin! Repent!** Our God is slow to anger and has abundant mercy. They even rejected the Messiah Himself. How could those people fail to see the desire of God?

We see human freedom. The will of the Lord was one thing, but their response was something else. "*But you were not willing.*" Man does have a choice. God's will is that all men should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Will all be saved? No! Why? Man, sad to say, chooses to reject God and His Son, Jesus. We wonder at the foolish response of the people. They rejected the Christ who could have saved them.

We see the stubbornness of man. Their hearts were so hard they failed to see the love, mercy and kindness of God. The Redeemer was there to save, but no acceptance of Him took place. Even chicks knew more than those people. At least they would run to the hen when the hen gave warnings. No so concerning these people.

Are we any different today? Does Jesus look at us today with love? Yes! Is He pleased with what He sees? No! Yes, we have had teacher after teacher. We know, but we are not willing. He longs to gather us all as a hen gathers her brood, but even today men choose to reject His call.

My brothers, when will we awake? Will our “house” become desolate (verse 35)? What is the real reason we do not assemble with the saints on Sunday night? Wednesday night? Television? Soccer? Softball? Shopping? Laziness? Surely tears must pour from the eyes of the Lord when He sees us choosing to reject His call of a daily walk with Him. We choose pleasure over remembrance of His body and blood. We choose fornication rather than a holy godly life. Will He send us to hell? Maybe it is better to say that we choose to reject Christ and thus we are choosing our own destruction. Where? In this life and in the one to come.

Bring Out the Best Robe!

“But the father said to his servants, Bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet” (Luke 15:22).

What a wonderful story of love! Tax collectors and sinners drew near to hear Jesus teaching. The scribes and Pharisees murmured saying, *“This man receives sinners and eats with them”* (Luke 15:2b). Why did Jesus spend time with such people? In three parables? the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son or sons, we see clearly the love of God for lost people.

In the third parable the younger son took his portion of the

goods and went to a far country. He wasted his possessions with prodigal living. Then the day came when his money was gone. He was destitute. He had no money, no friends and no job. Finally he got a job feeding the pigs and was so hungry he longed for the pig's food. When he came to himself, he said, "*How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger*" (Luke 15:17).

Yes, he finally realized he was living in sin and he made the decision to go home to his father. "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants*" (verses 18,19). Yes, he realized the folly of his life. Yes, he made a wonderful decision. "I must go home! I will admit my sin and ask to be a hired servant." He made the wise decision to return.

The son made his speech; he admitted his wrong-doing and requested the place of a servant. What did the Father do? Was the son rejected? Did he accept him as a servant? "Bring out the best robe for my Son." Not a servant, but my son who was dead is alive again. Put a ring on his finger, put sandals on his feet. The father embraced him warmly and kissed him. "*Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let us eat and rejoice*" (verse 22). What a celebration! What joy when one returns to the Father who is God.

Dear reader, have you wandered into sinful, neglectful living? Are you in want? Come home to the Father. He has the best robe waiting for all who will repent. Ask God to forgive you. He wants you as more than a servant. He wants you as **His son!** Come home to the Father today!

“Whatever He Says to You, Do It”

“His mother said to the servants, ‘Whatever He says to you, do it’” (John 2:5).

Jesus and His disciples were invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The mother of Jesus was also there. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to the Lord, *“They have no wine,”* (verse 3b). The reply of Jesus is found in verse 4 and then we find the statement found in verse 5. Jesus told the servants to fill six water pots with water. Then they were to draw out some and take it to the master of the feast (verses 7 and 8). They did as they were told and the master of the feast was amazed that the good wine had been kept until the end of the feast. Yes, the servants did as Jesus told them to do and the water was turned into wine.

It is still true today that we must **do whatever Jesus tells us to do**. When we comply with His instructions, then all will be right. Let us look at some examples of this important truth.

How can we have good Christian homes? Just follow the instructions of the Lord. Marry a Christian. Remember that this marriage covenant is for life. Submit to one another. Remember that the head of the home is the husband. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. Fathers are to rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Children are to obey their parents. Read Matthew 19:1-9; Ephesians 5:22; 6:4 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

How are we to worship God acceptably? We are to wor-

ship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24). This includes giving as prospered, singing, praying, partaking of the Lord's Supper and studying His word by preaching and teaching. Read 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; Acts 20:7.

How are we saved? We must do as Jesus instructs us. *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). *"I tell you, no; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:5). *"Therefore, whoever confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32,33). *"Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10b).

Let us be as wise as the servants at the wedding feast and do as Jesus instructs in every area of life. He does have all authority and is the head of the church, which is His body.

"But What Are They Among so Many?"

"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?" (John 6:9).

What were the problems? One problem was the lack of food for a great multitude. Jesus asked the following question in verse five, *"Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?"*

Philip answered that even 200 denarii would not be enough money to buy sufficient food for the huge crowd of people.

The second problem was that Jesus was testing Philip. *“But this he said to test him, for he knew himself what he would do”* (verse 6). Jesus knew He would take the five barley loaves and two small fish and feed 5,000 men. People would be fed and completely satisfied. In fact, twelve baskets of fragments were gathered up after they had eaten.

What were the results? Some thought that they should take Jesus by force and make Him king. See verse 15. They wanted an earthly king who would keep their stomachs full. The following day Jesus rebuked the people with these words, *“You seek me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled”* (verse 26b).

Others saw Jesus as the **prophet** who is to come into the world, verse 14. He truly was the prophet of which Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 18. Yes, He truly was and is the Messiah. However, most of the Jews were looking for a king who would overthrow the Roman rule. They saw Him as one who could lead them in battle and care for their bodily needs.

In verse 27 we have the “bottom line” given by Jesus. *“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you because God the Father has set his seal on Him.”*

Is There a Lesson for Us?

1. Yes. Jesus will give us all our daily needs (food, clothing, shelter), but we must *“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matthew 6:33).

2. We, like Philip, are being put to the test. Do we see Jesus as the **Prophet — the Messiah**? Do we see Him as the **Son of Man** who can give us the food which endures to eternal life? Jesus' message is needed today. **Do not labor for the food which perishes! Rather, labor for the food which endures to eternal life!** Brethren, what are we seeking first? For what are we laboring? Take a good look at your life today and then honestly answer these questions.

“We Wish to See Jesus!”

“Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee and asked him saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus’” (John 12:21).

Who were these people? According to verse 20 they were Greeks. Greeks who were among those who came up to worship at the feast. Were they pious, devout men like Cornelius? Were they Greeks who had taken up the Jewish religion? The text does not tell us. Maybe they were just curious. Perhaps they had heard of the great works done by our Lord and wanted to see Him in person. We do not know.

Were they trying to see the right person? Yes, certainly! They were on target. Jobs are important, but not as important as seeing Jesus. Food, clothing and shelter are necessary, but to “see” the Lord is of the highest importance. Have you ever seen a President of the United States in person? Those who have likely count that as an important event in their lives. Many years ago

Donna and I sat at the same table with the then President of Rhodesia, Africa. On another occasion we ate dinner in the same room with the Prime Minister.

However, to see Jesus is the greatest sight of all. Have you seen Him as your Savior? Have you seen Him as the Messiah or Christ? Have you seen Him as the head of His church? Have you seen Him as Lord of your daily life?

Where Will You and I See Him Today?

1. We should see Him in the Scriptures. Look carefully at the sermon given by Peter on Pentecost. He let the Scriptures speak so they could see Jesus. The problem is, too few people take time to let the Scriptures speak to us daily. The Old Testament speaks plainly about the coming Messiah (see Isaiah 53). Paul was able to bring many to “see” Jesus by preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
2. We should see Jesus in the lives of Christians. Paul wrote, *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20).

Are you like the Greeks? Do you wish to see Jesus? Then open your Bible and let this word speak of Jesus Christ. Ask a teacher to come into your home week after week so you can see Jesus in the word. Make sure you are present for every Bible class during the week. Never miss an assembly of the church on the Lord’s Day. Look at the Lord through the lives of godly men and women and you will see Jesus. *Can others see Jesus living in you?*

The Evil One!

"I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

Jesus will soon be betrayed and crucified. He is praying to the Father concerning His apostles. He does not want them to be taken out of the world, for that would mean their death. The apostles have a great task. What was it? To carry the saving message of the gospel to a lost world. They would bless the world by telling of the death of Christ for the sins of all. However, Jesus does make the request of God, the Father, that they should be kept from the evil one. Jesus desired the protection of God for His apostles.

Who is the evil one? He is Satan. He is the adversary and accuser. He is described by Jesus in the following language. *"You are of your Father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).* He is the devil, a demon, an evil spirit. He is a murderer! He is a liar!

What does he do? He lies. He accuses. He is a killer. He paints a beautiful picture of how great it will be to do his will. He never tells you the consequences. He wants you for his slave. *"Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin" (verse 34).* He knows that he will be cast into the lake of fire and wants you and me to be there also.

What did Jesus pray for? That God would keep them from this liar and murderer. Did God hear His prayer? Does God have the power to protect those who will follow him? Yes! Paul reminds us that we are not tempted beyond what we are able to bear. He reminds us that with every temptation there is a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). We are told to prepare ourselves by putting on the whole armor of God. *“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand”* (Ephesians 6:13).

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” Ephesians 6:11. That armor is **truth, the gospel of peace, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God** (verses 14-17).

Christians, let us take up the armor of God so we will not become captives of the evil one. Let us, like the apostles of old, take the gospel to a lost world.

The Stone Had Been Taken Away

“On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb” (John 20:1).

Jesus Christ the Son of God had been crucified. His body had been bound in strips of linen with the spices and placed in the tomb hewn out of rock. A guard had been placed at the tomb lest

His disciples should come by night and steal His body and then claim He had been raised from the dead (Matthew 27:64). The Sabbath was past and the first day of the week had come. It was still dark and Mary Magdalene came to the tomb of Jesus.

What did she see? She saw that the stone, which was huge, had been taken away. Did she think Christ had been raised from the dead? No! She ran to Peter and John with the following words. *"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid Him"* (John 20:2b). Her message caused these two disciples to run to the tomb. They saw the stone had been rolled away and they saw the linen cloths lying there. However, they saw no body. Where was the body? Had it been stolen by the disciples? If so, Peter and John knew nothing about the theft.

Why was the stone moved from the mouth of the tomb? Some suggest that it was rolled away so Jesus could get out or escape. Surely this would be no problem for the Son of God who could come into a room filled with disciples when the doors were shut. They were afraid of the Jews and for security they made sure the doors could not be opened. How did Jesus get inside? A closed door was no obstacle to the risen Lord. A stone at the mouth of the tomb was no problem. The stone being moved was a sign to the followers of Jesus that He had been raised from the dead. This, plus grave clothing, was proof to them that He had risen from the dead.

What changes did the resurrection produce in the disciples?

- A. They believed it to be truth (John 20:8).
- B. They boldly proclaimed His death, burial and

resurrection (Acts 2:22-24).

- C. They were willing to suffer imprisonment and beatings because of this truth (Acts 4:1-3; 5:40).
- D. They believed they too would be raised from the dead never to die again (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

My friend, what do you see today? Can you see the stone rolled away? What does this mean to you? Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins? Was He buried in a tomb? Was the stone rolled away? Was His body stolen? Was He raised from the dead? Do you have the hope of a resurrection? If you can see that He died for you and that He was raised from the dead, then why delay? Repent today, Acts 2:38. Confess His name before men, Matthew 10:32, 33. Be baptized into Christ today, Galatians 3:27.

Saved Without Baptism?

“Baptism has nothing to do with your salvation. It is only a symbol that you have been saved.”

“Yes, baptism is a command of God, but it is a command for Christians to obey.”

“We recommend baptism, but you can go to heaven without baptism.”

The quotes above are quite common today. The majority would likely say those statements are true. Are these statements true? Is the majority the standard?

Jesus said, *"And you will know the truth, and the truth will free you"* (John 8:32). What is this truth that will set a man free? Jesus while praying to His Father makes it clear that God's word, His teaching, is the truth. *"Set them apart in the truth; your teaching is truth"* (John 17:17). So let us call on God's word to find the truth about baptism.

What did Jesus say? *"He who believes and is immersed (baptized) shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). Where does Jesus place salvation? Before baptism? **No! No!** He places salvation after baptism. Do we dare change the teaching of God's Son? If we do, we will be accursed. *"But if we or a heavenly angel should proclaim a gospel contrary to the gospel which we proclaimed, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8).

What did Peter preach? To those on Pentecost Peter taught that God had made Jesus, the one they had crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). These people were stabbed in their hearts and cried out to Peter and the other apostles: *"What should we do?"* (verse 37b). Did they believe his message about Jesus? Yes! They did. What answer was given these people? *"Peter said to them 'Change your hearts (repent), and let each one of you be immersed (baptized) in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'"* (verse 38).

If one can be saved before baptism, then Peter did not know that truth. He placed forgiveness of sins (salvation) after repentance and baptism.

You and I must make a choice. For me and my house we will choose the words of Jesus Christ and Peter, His apostle. **Baptism is necessary for one to be saved!** Have you been baptized?

“I Find No Fault in Him!”

“Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him they cried out saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘You take Him and crucify Him for I find no fault in Him.’” (John 19:6).

The cry of the chief priests and officers was a cry of death: **“Crucify Him!”** Pilate knew that Jesus had committed no crime. He knew He was innocent. He said, **“I find no fault in Him.”**

The Jewish leaders were blinded by envy and desired the death of Jesus by crucifixion. Pilate, the Roman governor, knew Jesus was not guilty, but he gave in to pressure and allowed the Son of God to be killed on a cross.

Do you see any fault in Jesus Christ? Do you know the crimes He has committed? Did He ever lie? *“Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth”* (1 Peter 2:22). Was He ever tempted as we are tempted? Did He say “Yes” to these temptations? *“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15).

We should thank God daily for this one called Jesus. He took all of our sins to the cruel cross. *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). He died for our sins. He was raised from the dead the third day. He sits at the right hand of God. He reigns as King of Kings and as Lord of Lords. He has all authority. *“Then Jesus came and spoke to them saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth’”* (Matthew 28:18).

This one with no fault knows what is best for us all. He commands that we believe in Him (John 8:24). He commands all men to repent (Luke 13:3). This perfect one commands all men to confess Him before men (Matthew 10:32,33). He commands baptism (Mark 16:16). This one with no fault requires us to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10).

Now, when we fail to do what He commands, are we not saying we see some fault in Him? Does He not know what is best for your life? You who have never obeyed the gospel, will you point your finger at Jesus, the Judge, on the judgment day and point out His faults? I think not! I shudder to think of the weeping and wailing that will take place for those who reject the perfect Master. I rejoice to think of the salvation you and I have in Christ Jesus, the perfect High Priest, who intercedes for us each day!

“Do You Love Me More Than These?”

“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’” (John 21:15).

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Simon Peter and six other disciples of the Lord decided to go fishing (verse 3). They toiled all night, but caught nothing. When morning came Jesus stood on the shore and asked if they had any fish. Their answer

was “No.” Jesus then told them to cast the net on the right side of the boat and they would find some. They obeyed the Lord and caught 153 large fish. Next the Lord invited them to have breakfast.

After they had eaten, Jesus spoke these words to Peter, “*Do you love me more than these?*” Peter answered that he did love the Lord. Jesus told Peter, “*Feed my lambs.*” In verses 16 and 17 this same question was asked two more times. “*Peter, do you love me?*” Three times Peter said that he did.

Why did the Lord ask Peter the same question three times? Was it for emphasis? Did He want Peter to see how important it was to love Him? Maybe He asked three times because just a short time before Peter denied the Lord three times. “*Peter, do you love me more than these?*” These what? Fish, fellow disciples, your work of fishing, your boat? It may be difficult to know, but one thing is certain: Jesus wanted Peter to put the Lord first in his life.

Readers, we seem to be a lot like Peter. We talk a **big** devotion to the Lord. “Yes, I love Jesus.” How much do I love Him? Time and time again Scripture speaks of the necessity of loving Jesus. “*If you love me, keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*” (Matthew 22:37).

Are we like Peter? What do we love? Who do we love? Fish, food, pleasure, our boats, friends, sports? I do not know, for I am not the judge. However, it would appear that many of us have been “fishing” too long. We have never stopped to count the cost of being disciples of Jesus. Jesus said that those who would be His disciples must deny themselves and take up the cross daily and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

When you willfully absent yourselves from the Lord's table Sunday after Sunday, who do you love? When you stubbornly reject His command to repent and be baptized, who do you love? The hour is late, my friends. Satan is having a "ball" with our lives when the Lord is not our priority. I beg of you to repent and serve Him today. **Do you love Jesus? More than anything else? More than anyone else?**

He Is Coming Again

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:10,11).

Jesus came into this world as a man. He was born of a virgin named Mary. He willingly went to the cross and died for the sins of the world. He died for my sins! He died for your sins! On the third day He was raised from the dead never to die again. For forty days after His resurrection, He showed by many convincing proofs that He was alive. He spent these days speaking the things of the kingdom of God.

The apostles were given a great task. They were to be the witnesses of Christ Jesus starting in Jerusalem, moving on to Judea and then to Samaria. In fact they were to tell of the Son of God to the end of the earth! (verse 8)

Luke records that after He said the things above, *"He was*

lifted up and a cloud took Him up out of their sight” (verse 9). Will this Jesus really return? Is He coming again? Yes! Yes! Listen to other testimony.

“The Lord Himself, with a shouted command, at the archangel’s voice and God’s trumpet, will come down from heaven, and the dead ones in Christ will arise first. Then we who are living, the ones who remain, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

“And as it is appointed for men once to die, and judgment after this, so Christ also, once offered to bear the sins of many will appear a second time without sin, to those awaiting Him for salvation” (Hebrews 9:27,28).

“Behold! He comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him and those who pierced Him, and all the nations of the earth shall mourn over Him. Yes! Amen” (Revelation 1:7).

To those who are in Christ, His coming again will be a great joy! What anticipation! What a great hope we have! However, to those outside of Christ there will be condemnation. What a sad day to those who are not ready. Dear reader, Christ is coming again. No doubt about it. Are you in Christ? (Read Romans 6:3, 4.) Are you faithfully serving Him? If not, prepare today as we know not the day or hour that He will return.

What Shall We Do?

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart,

and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).

What a wonderful question! Could one ask a more important question? *"What shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). These thousands on Pentecost had been cut to the heart. They had heard Peter proclaim *"that God had made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* Just a few days before these Jews had cried, *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"* They got their wish and Jesus was killed on the cross.

They then realized their sin. They had killed the **Messiah**. They had crucified God's unique Son. Did God know this would take place? Yes. *"The One who was delivered up by God's decision and foreknowledge, you have nailed to the cross and killed by the hands of lawless men"* (verse 23). Their hearts had been stabbed with the truth that they were in sin. Thus their cry or question to Peter and the other apostles: *"What shall we do?"*

Peter gave the correct answer. He gave God's answer to their plight. *"Peter said to them, change your hearts and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (verse 38).

Peter gave two commands and then stated two promises. The first command was **repent** — **change your minds**. Luke 13:3 and 5. Next he told them to **be baptized** — **immersed**. This again had been commanded by the Son of God (Mark 16:16) What were the two promises?

1. Your sins will be forgiven and
2. You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Did the people on Pentecost obey these commands? Yes! How many? *“The ones who gladly received his message were immersed, and about three thousand souls were added in that day”* (verse 41). Were their sins forgiven? Yes! Did they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Yes! What a blessing and what joy. These people on Pentecost constituted the church which Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18). They were saved people.

Was their work completed? Was there anything else to do? Yes, listen to verse 42. *“They were holding fast to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”*

Do you know what to do to have your sins forgiven? Have you repented (changed)? Have you been immersed (baptized)? Jesus died for you, but cannot, will not, save you in disobedience. Today put your faith in Jesus Christ. Repent of every sin and be baptized.

Proclaiming the Message

“Those, therefore, who were scattered went about proclaiming the message” (Acts 8:4, McCord’s Translation).

“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (NKJV).

Who were scattered? *“On that day a great persecution came on all the called-out people in Jerusalem, and all were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apos-*

bles" (Acts 8:1). There was a persecution against the church, God's called-out people. We know the leader of that persecution was Saul of Tarsus. He made havoc of the church. The apostles at this point stayed in Jerusalem, but the rest of the church fled from the city. These were members of the church who had been called out of darkness and had entered the kingdom of light.

Where did they go? "Everywhere!" "Went about." They knew the command of Jesus. "*Go and make disciples of all nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 28:19). "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). That command of Jesus given to the apostles is still valid for us today. Every ethnic group must be taught. Every creature must hear the message of the gospel. Every village, town and city needs the message of salvation. My next door neighbor needs to hear.

What was the message taught? "The Word." "The Gospel." "The Message." "*Brothers, I make known to you the gospel which I proclaimed to you, which also you accepted, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold fast the certain message which I proclaimed to you, unless you have believed in vain. I gave to you as the most important things what I had also received; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; that He was buried; and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). That is the very message needed today. Men are lost in sin and only the gospel can save them.

What can you do? Pray! Teach! Exhort! Go with a teacher! You will be blessed.

“Had Invited”

“On the following day, when they arrived in Caesarea, Cornelius was expecting them, and had invited his relatives and close friends” (Acts 10:24).

I like the actions of Cornelius, the centurion. He was a man with many wonderful qualities. Luke describes him in these words, *“He was a devout and God-fearing man, with all his family; he did many deeds of charity for the people, and prayed to God constantly” (Acts 10:2).* He wanted to know the truth of God so that he and his family could be saved. Thus, as instructed by the angel, he sent for Simon Peter. Peter came as well as six other brethren.

According to Acts 10:36, four days had passed since Cornelius sent three men to fetch Peter. What did he do during this time? As a soldier he had his usual work duties. From verse two we know that he was also busy praying and doing deeds of charity for the people. He was such an upright man that even the entire Jewish community spoke well of him (Acts 10:22).

The 24th verse quoted at the beginning of this article shows the work of this man. **He had invited his relatives and close friends!** Yes, he opened his house so the gospel could be preached. Yes, he took time off from his job so he could learn the way of salvation. That was not enough. This devout man wanted others to be saved. He invited! He invited! Who did he invite? Those who were closest to him. He invited those who knew him best, his relatives and close friends. Did they heed his invitation? Verse 27 gives the answer, *“While he was talking with him, he entered, and found many people gathered.”*

When we plan a special meeting, what can we do?

1. Pray for the effort. Pray for the preacher, pray for the lost and pray for yourselves.
2. Invite others to come. Whom do you invite? Everyone, but especially invite your relatives and close friends.
3. Make sure you and your family are present every day or night for the gospel preaching. If we will do this, the word will not return void! Souls will be obedient to the gospel and souls will be strengthened.

No Condemnation!

“There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

What a blessing! What peace of mind! Praise God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is meant by condemnation? Sin pays wages. What wages are paid? **Death!** (Romans 6:23) However, the Christian has passed from death to life. Yes, we all have sinned, but Christ paid the debt for mankind. Through Jesus Christ every man and woman can be freed from condemnation. There is no need to fear the future. Man does not need to fear the judgment, for he can have peace through Christ Jesus.

Does a person need to be in Christ? Yes! Those who are in Christ Jesus have forgiveness of sins. Salvation is offered to all men, but not all accept that gracious offer. Christ Jesus paid the price for sin. *“He made Him who had not known sin to be a*

sin offering in our behalf, that by Him we might become God's righteousness" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What about a person who is outside of Jesus Christ? Then, there is no hope. There is condemnation. There is slavery to the devil. What a sad picture to those outside of Christ. Thanks be to God for His willingness to send Christ to take our place on the cross!

How does one enter Christ Jesus? Let us listen to the Word of God. *"Do you not know that as many of us as were immersed (baptized) into Christ Jesus were immersed (baptized) into His death?" (Romans 6:3). "For as many of you as were immersed into Christ clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Could the Bible be any plainer? Baptism (immersion) puts us into Christ Jesus where there is no condemnation. Of course prior to baptism there must be a faith in Christ Jesus and a willingness to turn from sin and to turn to God (Acts 3:19).*

Where are you, my friend? If you are in Christ you have no condemnation. You have salvation. If you are out of Christ, you stand condemned and have an eternity with the devil and his angels in a lake of fire.

Woe Is to Me!

"Though I proclaim the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because compulsion presses hard upon me; yes, woe is to me, if I do not proclaim the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

What caused Paul to proclaim the Gospel? He had been commissioned by the Lord to do this work. *"The God of our*

fathers has chosen you to know His will, and to see the righteous one, and to hear the voice from His mouth, because you will be a witness for Him to all people of the things you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:14,15).

Paul felt that he would be condemned if he did not heed and obey that commission to proclaim the gospel. He felt a great debt to the whole world and thus was ready to preach the gospel to all, *“I am debtor both to Greeks and foreigners, both to the wise and unwise. Therefore, I am eager to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome” (Romans 1:14,15).* This feeling of debt to preach the message of Christ drove him to city after city. Paul knew that the only power to save men from sin was the gospel, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God’s saving power to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).*

Whose work is it today to proclaim the Gospel? *“Go make disciples of all nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all the days to the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19,20).* *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is immersed shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15,16).* *“The things you have heard from me, through many witnesses, entrust to reliable men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).* It was the job of the apostles. The apostles taught that those who heard the message were then to teach reliable men who would then teach others. Today it is my work and yours. If we do not do it, who will?

What can we do to prepare for our Gospel meeting?

Pray! Pray for the preacher. Pray that he will be strong in the preaching of Christ Jesus. Pray that the whole church will support this meeting. Pray that hearts will be opened and lives changed. Pray for conversions and restorations.

Attend every meeting! You will be blessed richly and your example will encourage the preacher and fellow saints of God. You will become stronger spiritually as you feast daily on the living word.

Invite daily! Who? Your family. Your relatives. Your friends. Your neighbors. Your classmates. Your work mates. Invite all to come hear the gospel of Christ. Woe to us if we fail to carry this message to others.

Temptation!

"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

In chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians Paul has used the children of Israel as an example of what happened in the past. Israel was tempted and fell into sin and fell away from God. Let what happened to them be an example to Christians that we will not lust after evil things (verse 6). Learn a lesson from what they did. A warning is given in verse 12. *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."* We need warnings. Satan can easily capture the complacent child of God. However, we also need assurance. That we find in verse 13.

All men meet temptations. This is the common lot of all humanity. Temptations commenced in the garden of Eden. Even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was tempted. *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). Those Israelites were tempted to worship idols and they became idolaters. They were tempted to commit sexual immorality and they did become fornicators. They were tempted to tempt Christ and to murmur. Yes, they sinned for they gave in to Satan, the one who tempts. Satan tempts you and me daily.

But God is faithful. He is **one** who can be trusted. He is trustworthy! In what way?

1. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. The temptations we face are not beyond our ability to resist. God does not want us to be lost. He gave His Son on the cross so that we might be saved. Is He so unfaithful that He will allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear? **No!** He will defend and deliver His children.
2. This God provides a way of escape. Thank God there is a way to escape so we can endure. Each time He was tempted, Jesus used the Word to defeat the tempter. **“It is written.”** When temptation comes, draw near to God. *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:8). Stay close to God. His faithful servants will help you overcome the wiles of the devil.

Did God deliver Daniel from the lions? What about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and the fiery furnace? *“Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9).

The Gospel I Declare to You

“Brothers, I make known to you the gospel which I proclaimed to you, in which also you stand, through which you are also being saved, if you hold fast the certain message which I proclaimed to you, unless you have believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1,2).

What was this Gospel Paul proclaimed? *“I gave to you — as the most important thing — what I had also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that he was buried; and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).* That is a message needed by every man, woman, boy and girl:

1. Christ died for the sins of all men.
2. He was buried.
3. He was raised on the third day.

What power does this Gospel message have? It produces salvation, verse 2. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is God’s saving power to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).* Is there any other way by which man can be saved. No! Can a man save himself? No! Can he keep enough rules to save himself? No! Is he ever good enough to be saved by his goodness? No!

Does man have anything to do to be saved by this Gospel? Yes! Romans 1:16 says the Gospel can save *“everyone who*

believes." The message of the Gospel must be held fast according to 1 Corinthians 15:2. This Gospel must be obeyed. *"He will punish those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thessalonians 1:8). *"It is time for judgment to begin from God's house and if first from us, what will be the end of those who do not obey God's gospel?"* (1 Peter 4:17). Eternal punishment awaits those who **do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

How does one obey this Gospel? *"Do you not know that as many of us as were immersed into Jesus Christ were immersed into his death? We were buried together with him through immersion into death in order that we also might walk in newness of life, in the same manner that Christ was raised from the dead by the splendor of the Father"* (Romans 6:3,4). Man must hear the gospel message and believe (Romans 10:17; 1:16). He must repent of all sin. One must die to sin and turn to Christ (Luke 13:3). You only bury dead people in immersion (baptism). One must die to his old life and become a new man with a new life.

Bearing One Another's Burdens

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

The life of a Christian is one of concern for others. When we become members of the body of Christ we are to be concerned about the welfare of others in the body. Paul wrote *"that the*

members have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:25b-26). Christians who have grown spiritually will care for one another. Members of Christ's body who are trying to go to heaven and help others go will suffer with fellow members when they suffer and rejoice with those who receive honor.

My Christian brother and sister, is this what you and I do? How many of us have the attitude — "He got himself into that mess, now let's see him get out"? Is this bearing one another's burdens? When we show glee over the suffering of fellow disciples, does that accord with the will of God? When I become envious over the honor bestowed upon my brother or sister, is this what the Lord wants? Will this help Christ's body grow?

However, someone may point to Galatians 6:5 which reads: "*For each man will have to bear his own load.*" "You, see, this means his troubles are none of mine!" Let us look closer at Paul's writing. Surely he does not contradict himself.

The word translated "burden" in verse 2 comes from the Greek word *bare* which means that which is an overload. Paul is saying that we are to assist our brethren in bearing the crushing burdens of life. Without assistance of the brother, the "burden" would crush the bearer. In verse 5 the word "load" comes from the Greek word *phorton* which means "his own pack." This word was used in the first century to refer to the pack a soldier carried on a march. It is our responsibility to help our brothers bear their "overloads" but each man must shoulder his own "pack" or responsibility. As a Christian, I am not to shift my "pack" off on someone else, but when I have a "burden" my brothers are to help me.

Yes, let us bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ.

Saved By Grace!

“By grace you have been saved through faith, but this is not of yourselves! It is God's gift not of works, so that no one might boast. We are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Thank God for His grace! His great and wonderful favor toward man, which we did not deserve, has been made known through His Son Jesus Christ. God saw man in sin and in need of salvation. He knew the only way man could be saved was by the sacrifice of His Son. He, who knew no sin, became sin for us. Brethren, let us thank our God daily for His wonderful amazing grace.

Yes, salvation is by the grace of God, but we must accept this grace by our faith or trust in the message of grace. This message is, *“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; that He was buried; and that He was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). This faith-trust in God-Christ moves one to obey the gospel of Christ.

Does our obedience to the gospel message mean that we earned or paid for our salvation? No! Salvation is a gift of God. This salvation is not built on any meritorious works which we have done. There is no room for boasting. When the people on Pentecost heard Jesus proclaimed as **Lord** and **Christ** they were

stabbed in their hearts. They were convicted of their sin. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "What should we do?" The answer given by Peter was, "Repent and be baptized." On that same day three thousand did repent and were baptized (Acts 2:36-41).

Were those three thousand saved by grace? Yes! Did they obey the commands of God? Yes! Did their obedience pay for their salvation? No! However, their obedience did secure the salvation found only in Christ. Have you been saved by the grace of God? If not, turn from sin today. Put your faith in Christ Jesus and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

"Bring Them Up"

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

What a task! First, Paul gives a negative. **Do not provoke your children to anger.** When this takes place our children will pay little attention to what we do and say. Next, there is a positive command. **Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** Fathers, are we doing this? It would appear from surveys and observation that we are not fulfilling this injunction of scripture.

In a recent survey the results are shocking:

1. When both parents are active in the work of the church, 93% of the children remained faithful. **Excellent!**

2. When one parent was active 73% of the children remained faithful. **This shows our need to always marry active members of the church.**
3. When both parents were marginally active, their children remained faithful 53% of the time. **Such parents are helping almost half our children to die.**
4. When both parents attend infrequently only 6% of their children continued in the faith. **Such parents are failures in God's sight.**

Donna and I are not perfect parents, but our desire has always been that our children and grandchildren should serve the Lord faithfully. Fathers, what is your wish for your children? Do you make certain your children are always present each time the church assembles for worship and Bible study? Do you have a time daily that you open the Bible and read the word of God to your children? Can the Lord count on you to set a good example daily in front of your children? Do they know that the kingdom of God and His righteousness are first in your life? The time to change is today. Read the scripture again and then practice it.

Thanking God the Father

*"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **thanking** God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).*

*"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving**, let your*

requests be known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

*“Give **thanks** in everything, because this is God’s will in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).*

We are to thank God through Jesus Christ. Jesus our Lord has promised to carry our prayers to the Father. This includes our requests and thanksgiving (John 15:16). We can come into the throne room of the Father and give Him all praise and thanksgiving through Jesus our Lord (Hebrews 10:19-22).

We are to give thanks in everything. This is God’s will for all His children. Allow me to list some of the blessings poured down upon us by God and thus should cause us to give thanks to the Father.

1. We thank God for creating us. He made the first man of the dust of the ground, and yet we are made in His image. Do we act like Him?
2. We thank God for His great gift Jesus, His Son. He died for us! He took our place on the cross. He paid for our sins. Do we thank Him at His table each Lord’s day?
3. We thank God for the church. This church was built by Jesus, paid for by Jesus and has Jesus as its’ head. This church is the “called out” body of people. Christ loves His church. Do you? Christ nourishes and cares for His church. Do you?
4. We thank God for the Bible which is the Word of God. It reveals to us the way of salvation. This precious book is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. Do you love this Word enough to read it daily and then be obedient to its precepts?

5. We thank God for our families. Thank God for godly parents, mates and children. Parents, our precious children are gifts from God. Let us teach them each day of His way.
6. We thank God for His abundant physical blessings. We have plenty of food, clothing, houses and jobs. Of all people on the face of the earth, we have been blessed the most with material blessings. Do you and I use them to serve God? What better way to show thankfulness. Let us be thankful and express that thanks to God in word and in deed.

They Will Turn Their Ears Away from the Truth

“For the time will be when they will not tolerate wholesome teaching. According to their own desires, they will accumulate for themselves teachers, to have their ears tickled. They will turn away their ears from the truth, and will go astray after myths” (2 Timothy 4:3,4).

Warnings: These are the warning words from Paul the apostle to a young preacher, Timothy. Look carefully at the warnings.

1. Men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. (Wholesome teaching is God’s word and only His word).
2. Following their own wishes or desires they will seek teachers who will tickle their ears. (Men will seek

teachers who will speak soothing words).

3. They will turn away their ears from the truth. (The truth is God's word, John 17:17.)
4. Men will go astray following myths (legends or fables).

The solution: *“Proclaim the message. Be ready in good and bad times. Correct, reprove, and encourage with all patience and teaching”* (2 Timothy 4:2).

Is the medicine too bitter? Brethren, this is a matter of life and death. This means an eternity in heaven or hell. What will it be? The solution is: Proclaim the message. Preach the word. What word? God's word. His word is *“living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to a separation of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and is able to judge the heart's thought and intentions”* (Hebrews 4:11).

Proclaim the message of God at all times. There can be no time for “soft soaping.” The preacher is to correct or convince men. He is to reprove or rebuke those living in sin. Exhortation is to be a great part of the lessons. Sinners need to see the error of their way, but all must be encouraged to live better. This will require patience and teaching. **Teach! Teach!** God takes care of the increase when we plant and water the seed which is the word of God.

Let us redouble our efforts to speak the truth, all of the truth. Let us make sure that the word of God is taught daily in our homes. Let us make sure that our Bible classes Sunday morning and Wednesday nights are filled with the truth. Shepherds of the flock of God, let us be certain that the sermons are according to God's word. It may be later than you think.

Are You Faithful?

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

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give him food in due season?” (Matthew 24:45).

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10b).

Paul is very clear in his words to the Corinthian church. Be steadfast! Be firm! Be immovable! Be unshakable! Be busy daily abounding in the Lord’s work. Your labor for the Lord is not in vain. Would the Lord say you are faithful?

Jesus answers the question He poses in Matthew 24:45 when He asks, *“Who is a faithful and wise servant (slave)? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing?”*

Be faithful even if you have to die is the message of Jesus in Revelation to the church at Smyrna. I might have a vacation from my place of employment, but servants of Jesus are always on duty. Seven days a week and 24 hours a day we are called to serve our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ. What a privilege, what an honor!

Listed below are thought-provoking questions for everyone:

1. If your car starts one out of three times, do you consider

it faithful?

2. If your paper-boy skips the Sunday and Wednesday editions, is he a faithful deliverer?
3. If your refrigerator quits a day now and then, do you excuse it by saying that it works most of the time? Is it a faithful appliance?
4. If your water heater greets you with cold water one or two mornings a week, would you call it faithful?
5. If you miss a couple of house payments in a year, would your mortgage holder say that ten out of twelve wasn't bad and consider you faithful?
6. If you miss Bible classes and worship once or twice a month, are you faithful?

Let Him Be Accursed!

"But if we or a heavenly angel should proclaim a gospel contrary to the gospel which we proclaimed, let him be accursed. As we have previously said, now I repeat: if anyone proclaims a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8,9).

What was the problem? The congregations of Galatia were forsaking the one who had called them through the gospel of Christ and they were turning to a different gospel. Paul was at a loss to understand their deserting of the grace of God found in Jesus and turning so quickly to a gospel which was really not a gospel or good news at all (verse 6). The message Paul had

preached to them about Jesus Christ and Him crucified was now being distorted. These men troubling the Galatian Christians were teaching that one must be circumcised to be saved and one must keep Moses' law.

What was the message Paul had preached in Galatia? It was the same message he had preached everywhere. *"He gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present wicked world, according to the will of God our Father"* (Galatians 1:4). *"We preach Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness"* (1 Corinthians 2:2). *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any merit, but faith working through love"* (Galatians 5:6). *"May I not boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation"* (Galatians 6:14,15).

What would be the punishment to those who would preach a different Gospel? The Greek word here is anathema translated as accursed. It denotes in this passage an alienation from God or spiritual death. Anyone, including Paul or an angel who would preach a gospel different from what Paul had proclaimed would be accursed. Those who would preach a gospel contrary to Paul's message of salvation in Christ Jesus and Him alone, would be accursed.

Brethren, let us heed the warnings of Scripture. Let us teach the same gospel of Christ. This gospel has facts to be learned and believed. It has commands to be obeyed and promises to be received.

Gambling?

“Let him that stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).

Is gambling a sin? Would Jesus be a gambler? Should a Christian gamble?

What is gambling? To gamble is to “play games of chance for money or other stake” (Webster). Is that a sin? Who makes money off the casinos? **Only the owners!** Everyone else is a loser.

What are some reasons Christians should not gamble?

1. **The love of money or covetousness.** The philosophy is to get something for nothing. When one is a “winner” there are scores of losers. So, in fact, the one time “winner” is really a thief, having stolen from others. Those who gamble become slaves to the habit (Matthew 6:24).
2. **It destroys the family.** The gambler spends every spare moment at the “wheel” or “one armed bandit.” Wives and children are neglected. Rents are not paid and food is scarce because the money has been squandered at the betting table (1 Timothy 5:8). Who knows the number of divorces caused by this ugly addiction?
3. **It puts one in the wrong company.** *“Evil company corrupts good habits”* (1 Corinthians 15:33). Who is there? Those who want something for nothing. Those

who drink wine, beer and whiskey. How can a Christian associate with such people?

4. **It causes people to commit suicide.** “The University of California in San Diego recently conducted a study that found the suicide rate was up to **four** times higher in communities with thriving casinos than other comparable cities where gambling is not legal.” Scripture is very plain: *“Do not murder!”* (Matthew 5:21,22).
5. **The crime rate increases.** “Since last January arrests in Jackson County are up 60%, a figure partly attributed to the new casino.” Drunk driving arrests are up 220%!
6. **It costs the taxpayer.** A University of Minnesota report claims that social costs attributed to compulsive gamblers alone would equal half the casino’s revenues. This study claims it costs the taxpayers of Minnesota \$13, 200 for every problem gambler to have him prosecuted and jailed and retribute the victims of the gambler.

Would Jesus gamble? Not on your life! Should a Christian gamble? No!

That I May Open My Mouth Boldly

“Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for

all the saints — and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:18,19).

Paul had a request. Pray! Pray in the Spirit at all times. Stay alert! Keep on praying and pray for all the saints. Some are weak, some are timid and some are in great trials and afflictions. **Pray! Pray!** Call on the God who has all power and One who is a good God. Call on Him who wants all men to be saved. Speak to the father who will always give the best to His children.

Paul requests prayers for himself. Paul wants to make known the gospel with clarity. He wants to be effective in his work of proclamation. He also requests that they pray that he will be bold in his preaching. Perhaps his lack of freedom prompted this request. Not all want to hear the message of God. Many living in sin are not happy when they hear sin denounced. The temptation then is to be “soft” or quiet. No, this was not the will of God.

This was also the request of the early church after Peter and John had been threatened. They had been told not to preach anymore in the name of Jesus. Did they heed the warning? No! They prayed to the Lord God and asked Him for boldness that they might speak His word boldly. Did God grant their request? Yes! *“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).*

We need to speak the word with boldness today. Who will rebuke sin if we do not? Who will teach others of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, if we don't? You know the answer. No one! Yes, you and I know what to do but so many times we lack **bold-**

ness to do this. What is the solution? **Ask God for boldness.** Ask others to pray to God that you will be without fear to speak to others of the Lord. Does it take boldness to invite people to come meet with the church? Yes, but we know this is a good work. Does it take boldness to ask someone to study the Bible with you? Yes, it does. We all fear rejection, but take heart and ask God to give you boldness. He is right there to provide the strength you and I need.

Appropriate Apparel

“And in the same way, that women adorn themselves with appropriate apparel, in modesty and good sense; not with elaborate hair styles, and gold or pearls or expensive clothing, but through good works, which befit women professing godliness” (1 Timothy 2:9-11).

Sisters in Christ, please listen to the Scripture. How can God’s woman make herself attractive? What makes a Christian lady beautiful in the sight of God? Should this be your primary concern? Yes!

Adorn yourselves with appropriate apparel. The word translated “apparel” suggests clothing that accords with the honorable character of the wearer. The word “modest” suggests an attitude of respect and reverence toward others and toward God. “Good sense” suggests simplicity as well as reverence.

Some items should not be worn. “Elaborate hair styles, gold or pearls or expensive clothing” should not be worn. This would be the description of the worldly woman who spends

much of her time, energy and money to make herself physically attractive. Extravagance and vanity are seen in this picture. This cannot be the clothing or attire for the Christian.

Those who profess godliness will adorn themselves with good deeds. Would this describe Dorcas? *“This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did”* (Acts 10:36b). *“And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them”* (Acts 10:39b).

Sisters, warm and hot weather will be here soon. Take a good look at your apparel before you leave your house to go to shop or work. Does your clothing, or lack of clothing, show respect or reverence toward others and especially our God? Clothing that encourages lust and evil desire must not be worn by the woman who serves God. Yes, I know the world wears this apparel, but Christians are different from the world.

Let us heed the teachings of God and thus bring glory to God, Jesus Christ and His church by dressing modestly and adorning ourselves with good deeds. This will bring glory to God.

Great Gain

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out; and since we have food and clothes, let us be content with these” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

What is great gain? What is the reward man seeks? Paul

instructs Timothy, and us today, about the **great gain**. The answer is quite simple and yet missed by most people. **Great gain is godliness with contentment.**

What is godliness? One who is devout, godly, pious, reverent or one who is religious. This word is used to describe Cornelius and is translated “devout” in Acts 10:7. Peter used this word in Acts 3:12 where it is translated as “godliness.” It has the idea of religious duty. Today we see too few who are interested in being pious and reverent. Life is being lived too fast. The “buck” and pleasure become so important that we miss out on the **great gain**.

What is contentment? This word is also found in 2 Corinthians 9:8 and Philippians 4:11. It means having a sufficiency of the necessities of life. Jesus Christ speaks this message in Matthew 6:25-34. Don't worry about food and clothing. Seek the kingdom of God and righteousness first and all life's necessities will be provided.

What will we take out of this world? We will take out just as much clothing as we brought into this world. How much money will we take with us when we die? How many houses? Stocks and bonds? **Nil!** We brought nothing in and we will take nothing out.

With what should we be content? Food and clothing. The word for food implies not only subsistence but also the means of subsistence. Yes, a job. It means to make enough to put food on the table. The word for clothing means not only clothes we wear but also shelter or a place to live. We may not live in a mansion or make \$100,000 a year, but we must be content with what we have. If material wealth is our aim in life, we will never find contentment.

Stop! Look! Are you content? Are you godly? Is Christ living in you? Is His church, the body of Christ, important to you? More important than money, sports and a bigger, newer house? Get a good spiritual check-up today. Tomorrow may be too late. It is **great gain** to have godliness with contentment.

Neglect So Great Salvation?

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was first spoken by the Lord, and it has been verified to us by them who heard Him” (Hebrews 2:3).

What is salvation? It is the salvation first spoken by the Lord. It is the salvation that frees man from all sin. This is the salvation spoken by others who had heard Jesus. The writer of Hebrews was not an eyewitness of Jesus, but he had no doubt about the message of salvation. ***“It has been verified to us by them who heard him.”*** Brothers, there is no greater message than the truth that Jesus died for our sins. He was buried and rose again the third day. Praise God for this salvation.

Why were some neglecting the great salvation? The word neglect means “to ignore or disregard,” “not to care for or attend.” Were they turning back to the Old Covenant of God given by Moses? Had they forgotten the purchase price for their salvation? Had they forgotten the teaching of God’s word?

Perhaps they were like too many today. We ignore and disregard the great salvation because we are too busy with worldly

pursuits. We have wrong priorities. We are focused on things rather than on CHRIST.

Is there any escape when we neglect this great salvation? No! There is no escape! Let the Hebrew author answer the question. *“If the message spoken by angels was verified, and every transgression and disobedience received just punishment, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?”* (verses 2,3A). The Hebrews were facing a crisis. They were drifting away from the Lord. They were ceasing to care for the Lord and His church.

Have you looked at your spiritual life today? Did you make time every day to pray to God? Why not? Did you make time every day to read and study His word? Why not? Did you this past week make sure you were present every time the church met? If not, why not? Too many of us are neglecting our great salvation. We are drifting away from God. Yes, we still have lip service, but no commitment. Worldly pursuits have become the priority. We have our eyes focused on someone or something instead of on Jesus. *“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the originator and completer of the faith, who endured the cross because of the joy set before him, disregarding the shame, and sat down at the right side of God’s throne”* (Hebrews 12:2).

There is no escape for those who neglect their salvation. What about you?

You Ought to Be Teachers

“By this time you ought to be teachers, but you again

need someone to teach you the first principles of God's oracles; you need milk, not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12).

The author of Hebrews is not pleased with the spiritual development of the Hebrew Christians. They were hard of hearing and thus he was not able to pass on some teachings to them (verse 11). They were children or babies who could only partake of milk.

It takes time to grow. This is true of a physical body, but it is also true spiritually. We do not expect a two-year-old boy to be six feet tall. We are born into the kingdom of God by water and Spirit. God does not expect instant mature Christians. However, after time, He does expect growth. Enough time had passed for growth to have taken place, but these Hebrews had not grown. Enough time had passed that they should have become teachers.

They were immature. They were in need of someone to teach them again the first principles of God's oracles. They needed milk, not solid food or meat. They were untested in the word of righteousness (verse 13). They were unable to discriminate between good and evil (verse 14).

Too many today are children spiritually. The cry is for entertainment and soft easy lessons. Give us milk, preacher! You must keep us happy! Thus, the church suffers. She lacks good capable, mature teachers. Like children, we attend a public assembly when we "feel" like doing so. What a shame! Shame for those of us who call ourselves children of God and what a shame that the world dies in sin because we have never grown spiritually.

Grow spiritually this year!! How can this be done? Pray

to God asking His help. Get into His word. Study daily. Never forsake a Bible class or time for worship and instruction. Teach what you have learned to your family, friends and neighbors. You will become mature. The number of years that you have been a follower of Jesus may say nothing about how you have grown spiritually.

“Therefore, let us leave the first principles of Christ’s message, and let us grow to adulthood” (Hebrews 6:1b).

Eternal Redemption

“But after Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come through the greater and more complete tent not made with hands (that is, not of this creation, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood), He entered the Most Holy place once for all time, obtaining eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11,12).

Hebrews has much to say about blood. Look at the following passages from your Bible.

The blood offered under the First Testament.

1. It was animal blood (Hebrews 9:12).
2. This blood was offered by the high priest for himself and for all the people (Hebrews 9:7).
3. This blood did not remove sin (Hebrews 10:3, 4). *“But with them there is an annual remembrance of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take sins away.”*

The blood offered under the New Testament

1. This blood obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12).
2. This blood of Christ purifies us to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14).
3. This blood of Jesus gives us boldness to enter the sanctuary of God (Hebrews 10:19).
4. There is punishment for those counting the blood of this covenant as common (Hebrews 10:29).
5. This blood consecrates the people (Hebrews 13:12).
6. This blood of Christ: *"May the God of peace, who brought from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, equip us with every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory forever and ever, amen"* (Hebrews 13:20,21).

Let us thank God for the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son! Let us never fail to remember His precious blood every Lord's Day as we eat and drink at His table. Let us carry the message of eternal redemption through this blood to all men.

Not Forsaking the Gathering of Ourselves Together

"Not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, as it is customary for some; but cheering up one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

When the church assembles, you and I should be present. Satan is busy doing his best to destroy our lives in Christ. Is Satan pleased when I am present every time on Sunday morning and evening? What about midweek meeting? You know the answer. He will do his best to keep you from every gathering of the people of God. How does Satan do this? Does he say, "Don't meet with those Christians"? Of course not. He is too deceptive for that method of attack. Let me suggest some of his devices.

You need to be at home with your family. Yes, we all need time with our families at home, but our families need to be taught of the way of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Our families need the teaching and "cheering up" they receive from the assemblies of the Saints. Jesus tells us plainly to seek FIRST God's righteousness and His kingdom (Matthew 6:33).

You need time for recreation. Golf? Soccer? Baseball? Watching television? Yes, recreation is important but remember Paul's words to Timothy, *"For bodily training is scarcely profitable, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of*

life both now and hereafter" (1 Timothy 4:8). We need to get our lives with the right priorities. Bodily training or exercise profits little, but godliness is profitable for all things! That is true in this life and in the next.

You need time to do your special project. What could be more important than God's kingdom? What is more important than the souls of your family? *"What will a man be profited if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26).

You need to entertain company. Yes, we need to show hospitality. Our homes should be places of welcome to all. Is this an either-or situation? Why not show hospitality and bring your company to the assembly of the church? We need to be busy like Andrew who brought his own brother to the Lord (John 1:41, 42).

You can give other lies which Satan uses to try to convince us that the assemblies can be missed and you can still be faithful. Not so! You cannot serve two masters.

Tomorrow

"Come now, you who are saying, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to a certain city and spend a year there; we will trade and make a profit.' You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? You are a vapor which briefly appears and then vanishes" (James 4:13,14).

"Tomorrow," he promises his conscience, "tomorrow I mean to believe; tomorrow I will think as I ought to, tomorrow I will

receive my Savior. Tomorrow I'll conquer the habits that hold me from heaven away. One word, and one only: **Today**. Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow — thus, day after day, it went on; tomorrow, tomorrow —

Today is the day of salvation,
Tomorrow may be too late.
There's danger and death in delaying
Accept God's saving Grace
His life on the cross He has given
O come while yet you may,
He's earnestly pleading,
Oh make no delay,
Tomorrow may be too late.

From *Tomorrow May Be Too Late!* By Palmer E. Wheeler, **Sons of the Church**.

There is nothing wrong in making plans for tomorrow. The Bible teaches preparation. "Prepare for eternity" is a wonderful message. Prepare to meet your God. Are you a Christian? Have you obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ? When will you come back to the Lord? The answer comes back again and again, "Preacher, I will do that **tomorrow**."

James reminds us of the folly of thinking we will do this or that tomorrow. Our lives are like vapors. They appear briefly and then vanish away. Yes, the young die also. It could be a disease or a heart attack. It could be an accident and there is no **tomorrow** to be ready to meet the Lord. You who know what you need to do, then do it **today!** Tomorrow may never be. Lay that filthy habit aside and live a pure life. Do that good deed you have thought of doing today. Commit yourself to God and His will while you have a chance today.

A Living Hope!

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His plentiful mercy has begotten us again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Peter addresses his letter to the exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (verse 1). The earth was not their real home. These people had been called out of the world and were now a part of God’s family. They were being persecuted, but they had a living hope.

Praise must be given to God. This God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the God who is eternal. He is all powerful. He is all knowing. He is love, He has mercy. Praise Him! Praise Him today! Give glory to Him tomorrow and the day after! Praise Him in the assembly of the church saying, *“I will proclaim your name to my brothers. I will sing hymns of praise to you among the called out people”* (Hebrews 2:12). Fellow saints, let us lift our voices in praise to this great God who gave His Son to die for us. Failure to praise Him indicates a lack of gratitude.

The mercy of God is plentiful. Peter sees divine compassion. Without the mercy of God they had no hope. Without His plentiful mercy we would have no hope. What did God see in you and me? What did He see in those exiles 1,900 years ago? He saw men and women full of sin. God saw people who could not save themselves. Thus He sent His Son. Why? He was and is merciful. His mercy makes possible the new birth. We can be born again. We have life in Christ. The old has gone and we are

new creatures. We thank and praise God. Jesus said, *"Unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter God's kingdom"* (John 3:5). Man must obey the word of truth (1 Peter 1:23). Man must be baptized into Christ Jesus (Romans 6:3,4).

Christians have a living hope. Those who do not experience the new birth do not have hope. Prior to conversion, men are without hope (Ephesians 2:12). This hope is a confident expectation that God will do what He has promised. Not only are we blessed abundantly in Christ with every spiritual blessing but we have an imperishable unstained inheritance which is reserved in heaven for all God's children. This is a living hope. It is grounded in the promises of God and its object is life eternal. It is a living hope because Jesus did not stay in the tomb. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. He reigns in heaven. He has all power. He will, by His power, protect all who have faith in Him. Trials will come, but this is a way of testing, *"that you might be found in praise and glory and honor at the disclosure of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:7).

Does Water Baptism Save Us?

"Who formerly were disobedient when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of

the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20,21).

Look at Noah. Peter writes that eight souls were saved through water. Who were they? Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives were those who were saved through water. The water that destroyed others became the means of deliverance to Noah and his family. The corrupt world was destroyed and the earth was cleansed. The ark was borne up by the water that killed all corrupt people.

Look at Peter’s message about us. Peter wants his readers to know something about salvation from sin. What is it, Brother Peter? Peter can see a resemblance between what happened to Noah and to his readers today. Baptism is a resemblance or an antitype of the water through which Noah was saved. Thus as the water of the flood delivered Noah so baptism is the dividing line between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Baptism is not for the purpose of removing dirt from our bodies.

Look at other passages about the importance of baptism.

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:36,38).

““Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days” (Acts 10:47,48).

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

What are you waiting for? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repent of all sins. Deny self and follow Jesus. Confess His name before men and be baptized now!

Spare No Effort

"For this reason spare no effort to add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, endurance and to endurance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly affection, and to brotherly affection, love" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The last year is gone and the new year is here. What we have done or not done in the previous year has been seen and recorded by God. Sins committed can be forgiven, if we turn to God while there is still time. Now, what about this year? What will you and I do with these 365 days? What changes will we make? Will we do any addition? Will we add the qualities set forth above? Will we choose to cut away the sins that hinder our progress as God's people?

Peter, the apostle, addresses this letter to *"those who have obtained the precious faith"* (verse 1). He points out that *"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness."* We can do what God wants us to do. We can be what He wants us to be. We must make the choice. We can be sharers of the divine nature.

What are these qualities we must add or supply in our lives?

1. Faith — conviction, assurance, trust and confidence in God.
2. Virtue — courage, the manliness, the determination to do what is right.
3. Knowledge — comprehension, understanding the will of Christ.
4. Self-control — mastery of the appetites.
5. Endurance — the ability to persevere in the face of difficulties.
6. Godliness — reverence and piety toward God.
7. Brotherly affection — the love which brothers have for the family of God.
8. Love — a love of intelligence and purpose. The love that looks on others with consideration and regard.

Now, Peter, what will we receive if we add or supply these qualities? *“If these things are in you and abound, you will be neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (verse 8).

Brethren, let us supplement our lives with these attributes this year. Let us exhort and encourage one another to grow. It can be done!

Walking in the Light

“But if we are walking in the light, as He is in the light,

we continue in fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son continues to cleanse us from every sin" (1 John 1:7).

What a wonderful, beautiful passage of Scripture! This word of the Lord should encourage us to serve faithfully. Note the following truths.

We are to keep walking in the light. "Walking" means living or conducting oneself in a particular way. "Walking in the light" means walking in the way of God. God is light. In God there is no darkness. He is pure and sinless. When we are walking in darkness we are walking or living in sin. Christians are to walk in holiness according to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

We have fellowship with one another. If we are walking in the light we have fellowship with those who are also walking in the light. Yes, when we walk in the light we have partnership with our brethren. We know those brethren will help us in all the trials and tribulations which life brings our way. They weep with us when we weep and they rejoice with us when we rejoice. They help us bear our heavy burdens. We thank God for this beautiful fellowship.

The blood of Jesus continues to work. The day we were baptized into Jesus Christ every past sin was removed. We were made clean and pure by the blood of Jesus Christ. **Praise God!** The blood of Jesus is still cleansing. This precious blood of our Lord, the spotless Lamb, takes away every sin. Does a child of God ever sin after baptism? Yes, for if we say we have no sin, we are only deceiving ourselves. The truth is not in us (verse 8). But to those who walk in the light, the blood removes all sin. This verse should help us see the great importance of walking —

living according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. When we do this, the blood cleanses us of all sin.

“If we continue to confess our sins, he is dependable and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His message is not in us” (1 John 1:9,10).

We Love God!

“In this we know that we love God’s children, when we love God and do His commandments. This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:2, 3).

God has tied together love and keeping His commandments. It is not an either-or situation. Love God, for that is all we need to remember. Commands of God have nothing to do with loving God. Are those statements true? It seems quite obvious that love is important. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37,38). The second command is to love your neighbor as you love yourself (verse 39). Now what about love and commandments? Did Jesus not tie them together as recorded by Matthew? **The greatest commandment is to love!**

The basis of keeping God’s commands is love. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). Why do people not keep God’s commandments? Perhaps for some, it is ignorance. Some people do not know what God tells us to do in His book, the Bible. However, many today do not obey His com-

mandments because they have no love for God. “They talk a good talk, but fail to walk the walk.”

Look at a few commands which are ignored today. *“If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross and let him follow me”* (Matthew 16:24).

“He who believes and is immersed (baptized), shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

“I received from the Lord what I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, gave thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in memory of me.’ Likewise, He also took the cup after eating and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink, Do this in memory of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

“Beloved, I beg you, as strangers and exiles, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (2 Peter 2:11).

Blessed Is He

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).

How can a man be blessed by the Lord God? How can a man be fortunate or happy? Jesus gives us blessings or beatitudes in Matthew chapter five, and the book of Revelation also has seven beatitudes. This passage gives us three important ways we can

be blessed by God.

Blessed is he who reads the words of this prophecy. Revelation is probably the most neglected book in the New Testament. All sorts of excuses are given for not reading this book. "It is hard to understand." "It has a large number of symbols." "I read it once and didn't understand it." Look again! God wants His word read. Revelation is a part of His word. Read it publicly. Read it in the Bible classroom. Read it in your own home. Jesus promises that you will be blessed.

Blessed is the person who hears the word of this prophecy. What could be more beautiful to the ear than to hear God's word? You and I are promised happiness when we listen to the word of God. Do we not get bombarded with evil news daily? Let's switch off that bad news and listen to the good news of the Lord God. Open your own Bible. Read the message aloud. Listen to what you are reading. Listen to the word as it is read in the Bible class situation. Listen as the Bible reader reads publicly. Listen to the words of God as the preacher reads the words of the prophecy of this book. You will be blessed by hearing the word.

Blessed is he who does the things written in this book. Yes, what we read and hear must be put into practice. We cannot practice what we do not know. Take the knowledge found in the word of God and then do it. Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter heaven's kingdom, but the one who does the will of my heavenly Father*" (Matthew 7:21).

I Come Like a Thief!

“Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, so that he will not walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15).

There is a warning! Jesus is coming! This is a promise made many times in scripture. To those who are faithful servants, it will be a wonderful happy day. However, to many, Jesus will come as a thief. This was the warning given to the congregation at Sardis. *“Remember therefore how you have received and heard and hold fast and change your heart. If therefore you do not watch, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you” (Revelation 3:3).*

Was the church at Sardis ready? In verse two, the Lord told them that they were dead! Alive physically, but dead spiritually. They had a name that they were alive, but sad to say, they were dead! The command to the church was to **repent**. Change your heart.

In what sense will Jesus come as a thief? His coming will be unexpected. No one knows the day or the hour. Therefore, we must be ready (Matthew 24:42). *“Therefore watch, because you do not know what day your Lord comes.”* Since we do not know the time, the only wise plan is to be ready.

Blessed is he who watches. This is the person who is ready. This is the child of God who knows there is a battle raging. He keeps his garments. He has put on the full armor of God. *“Therefore stand, with the belt of truth around your waist; put on the breastplate of righteousness, and on your feet the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One; take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word” (Ephesians 6:14-17).*

This is the person who has covered his nakedness with right-

cousness. He has no shame. *"All of you are God's children through the faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were immersed into Christ clothed yourself with Christ"* (Galatians 3:26,27). When one is baptized into Christ, he is to wear Christ. That is, he will be like Him in heart, temperament and character.

Are you ready for the return of Christ? Have you turned from sin and been baptized into Christ? (Acts 3:19; Matthew 28:19, 20) If you have entered Christ, then are you fully clothed? Those who are ready are blessed. They are happy and look forward to His coming.

Worship Sometimes Refused

"It matters not how we worship God just so long as our hearts are right." I heard words to this effect last Sunday morning over the radio. The words were spoken by a man who is a "teacher of God's Word." This might surprise you, but my opinion is that what he stated is accepted by thousands of religious people throughout our land.

Is it true that it matters not how we worship God? Let us look briefly at what has happened in times past.

1. During the time of Cain and Abel, did it matter how one worshipped God? Most assuredly it did. Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and it was accepted (Hebrews 11:4). Paul tells us in Romans 10:17 that faith comes by hearing and hearing by God's word. Thus, we conclude

both men heard God's word, but only one obeyed the Lord and worshipped as commanded by God. Maybe Cain thought, "God does not mind, after all, I am offering the best of my crops." But it did matter and God refused his offering.

2. Look at the two priests, Nadab and Abihu. "*Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord*" (Leviticus 10:1,2). Did this strange fire please the Lord? No. What made it strange or unholy? The answer is found in verse one. It was fire which had not been commanded by God. Can my worship to God please Him, if it has not been commanded by God?
3. Look at the case of Saul of Tarsus. He thought it was right to persecute the church and to worship after the laws which had been given through Moses. Did God accept his worship? Quite obviously He did not. Paul was convinced that he was following the right way, but he was wrong. "*I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth*" (Acts 26:9).
4. Note the people of Athens who were worshipping an unknown God in ignorance. Paul said, "*For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you*" (Acts 17:23, KJV). These people did not know the God of heaven and earth. They did not know how to worship Him, although

they were apparently doing the best they knew. Did this make their worship acceptable? Paul told them that there was a time when God overlooked this ignorance but now He commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

Surely the same is true today. God has given us His word. Why? It has been given to us so we might know what to do and how to do the things that will be pleasing to God. David said that the word was a lamp unto his feet and a light to his path (cf. Psalm 119:105). Can a man really have a heart that is right with God and disregard God's commands concerning worship? The Bible answer is "No."

Note Jesus as He speaks to the people of His day. He found fault with them because they were hypocrites and because they were worshipping after the commands of men, and this meant they were laying aside God's commands. *"And he said to them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men'"* (Mark 7:6-8). God will not accept "lip" worship but He also states here that when we worship after the precepts of men we worship in vain. It seems to me that this is what many men are doing today. We are laying aside God's commands concerning not only worship, but concerning all the things God commands and we have inserted our own traditions or ideas. Such produces vanity.

May I urge you to go back to God's word and to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). Let us make sure we have a "thus saith the Lord" for what we teach and practice. God seeks (earnestly desires) such to worship him.

The Promise of Heaven

Recently I was given a tract while door knocking. The tract bears the title above and was published by *Good News Publishers* in Wheaton, Illinois. The author is John F. McArthur. The tract has some truth concerning heaven, man's sin and Jesus Christ. However, it fails miserably when it comes to telling man what he must do to be saved. I now quote from the last page of this tract. "If you would like to know Jesus Christ as your Savior and have the promise of heaven, we would encourage you to receive Him right now wherever you are. Simply pray, Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner and I know that you died for me to pay for my sins. Please forgive me and make me one of your own that I may live in heaven with you for all eternity. If you have prayed to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior and would like more literature to help you grow as a Christian, please sign your name and write to us at the address below to tell us of your decision."

It seems very clear that the tract teaches that one is saved from sin by merely praying the prayer quoted above. According to the tract, that makes one a Christian. Does the Bible teach such things? No!

Jesus taught that unless man would believe that He is the Christ of God he would die in his sins. "*I said to you, 'You shall die in your sins' for if you do not believe I am he, you shall die in your sins*" (John 8:24).

Jesus taught that men must repent of all sin or they will perish. "*No, I assure you, but unless you change your hearts (repent), all of you will likewise perish*" (Luke 13:3,5).

Peter commanded repentance in Acts 3:19: *“Change your hearts (repent) therefore, and turn so that your sins may be wiped away.”* Paul spoke clearly in Acts 17:30,31. *“God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now he orders all men everywhere to change their hearts (repent), since he has appointed a day in which he shall righteously judge the world by that man whom he has appointed; and he has given assurance to everyone by raising him from the dead.”*

Jesus commanded men to be baptized, *“He who believes and is immersed (baptized) shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned”* (Mark 16:16).

Dear readers, beware! False teaching can never take you to heaven. Put your trust (faith) in Jesus Christ. Change your hearts by turning from sin and turn to the Lord, according to the Scripture.