

**TRUTHS THAT LEAD
TO ETERNAL LIFE**

BY

V. P. BLACK

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FOREWORD

There is no questioning the statement that the Bible is the Book of all books. All the great thinking of all the great men of the world cannot equal the teachings of the Bible.

It is the purpose of this book to show that the Bible is a practical book, and when we preach the Bible we will do practical teaching.

During my forty years of work with the Plateau Church (now Central) in Mobile, Alabama these are some of the lessons I taught the church.

I believe with all my heart the Bible is God's complete, final and authoritative revelation to man. I also believe the most needed thing in the Lord's church today is just plain simple Bible teaching. Yes, we need more Bible taught and fewer human interest stories told from the pulpits.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife, Lourine Black; my son, Van P. Black; my daughter, Becky Norton; my son-in-law, Ted Norton; and my grandchildren: Lance Black, Alan Norton, Jane Norton, Wade Norton and Dean Norton.



V. P. BLACK

INTRODUCTION

I was in high school when V. P. Black came to Corinth, Mississippi to conduct a gospel meeting with the West Corinth Church of Christ where J. A. Thornton was the local preacher. Being a young Christian, I had never heard of him before that occasion. Of course I looked on him as being an older man at that time, but obviously, he was a young man himself. He didn't preach like a young man, however. He preached the plain gospel of Jesus Christ with maturity and power. Needless to say, I was greatly impressed.

Since that time I have had the opportunity to hear Brother Black preach at different times in different places. I have continued to be impressed with his knowledge of God's word and his ability to forcefully proclaim it. Although he did local work for many years with the church in Plateau, Alabama, and continues to serve them as their evangelist, he is widely used in meeting work and especially in Stewardship meetings.

I well remember the time I visited the Plateau congregation, where Brother Black was preaching, while preparing to go to Pakistan and India. The elders were kind enough to allow me to speak to the church, and Brother Black introduced me to the brethren and encouraged me in my efforts to spread the cause of Christ.

Brother Black has come to be recognized as one of the great preachers of our time. He has authored a number of books, six of which are stewardship books. The latest one is called *The Proof of Your Love*. Over 400,000 of these stewardship books are in circulation and he conducts some twenty-five stewardship meetings a year. It has been conservatively estimated that, through these efforts, churches

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of Christ have increased their giving by as much as \$20,000,000 per year.

In addition to being in great demand for meetings and lectureships here in the States, Brother Black has made more than one trip abroad. In 1983 he preached in several meetings in Zambia, Central Africa. Brother Black has expressed his willingness to accompany me to India for some work there and I hope that this can become a reality.

I am especially happy to have been asked by Brother Black to print this new volume of his sermons. I am honored to be able to do so and I can commend this book without reservation. I want to wish Brother Black good health and many more years of service to the Lord.

J. C. Choate
Winona, Mississippi
February 12, 1984

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WHAT KIND OF BELIEVER IS THE BELIEVER OF JOHN 3:16?

All people who believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God teach that man must believe on Christ in order to be saved. Since the Bible teaches there are different kinds of faith, we want to see what kind of faith the Bible teaches one must have in order to be saved. The Bible definitely talks about two kinds of believers. There is the positive believer, and there is the negative believer.

POSITIVE BELIEVER

We will discuss the positive believer. The positive believer is a person who obeys God. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

The positive believer is justified before God. "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2).

According to Romans the fifth chapter, the positive believer has access to God's grace and has peace with God. The positive believer has the assurance of knowing that his sins have been forgiven.

"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

In John 3:16, Jesus assures every positive believer that he has eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

In the early days of New Testament Christianity when some of the Pharisees obeyed the gospel, they were trying to bind the law of circumcision on others who had obeyed the gospel.

“And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9).

When Agrippa heard Paul tell about his conversion, Paul tells Agrippa that his mission was to turn people from darkness to light. Because he was teaching the truth, the Jews caught him in the temple and went about to kill him. But Paul obtained help from God and was able to carry on his ministry. And as he thus spake for himself, we are told that Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, thou art beside thyself. Much learning doth make thee mad.” But Paul said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

Paul turned to Agrippa and said, “Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.”

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

Here is an example of a person who obviously believed, for he said he was almost persuaded to be a Christian. As far as the Bible reveals, Agrippa never obeyed the gospel. Why? Because he did not have a

positive faith. That is, his faith was not strong enough to lead him to do the things that God commanded him to do. This account is recorded in Acts 26:24-32.

The Pentecostians were positive believers. They believed what Peter taught and did what they were told to do. If you remember in reading Acts the second chapter when Peter proved to those people that God had raised Christ from the dead, we are told they were pricked in their heart and asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Those who believed what Peter taught to the extent that they obeyed what God commanded through the apostle Peter became children of God. But, no doubt, there were many on the day of Pentecost who believed what Peter preached, but did not render obedience unto it. That is, their faith was not strong enough to lead them to obey the commands of God.

In Acts 8:35-38, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; What doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Now notice what happened after he expressed this strong faith in Jesus Christ. "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." His faith led him to obey God.

In Acts 10:48, when the apostle Peter was sent to preach to the household of Cornelius, "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Why? Because they believed what Peter said, and to have a positive faith they must obey what the Lord had commanded them to do.

Every example of conversion recorded in the book of Acts shows that the believer was a positive believer whose faith led him to repent of his sins, confess the name of Christ and to be baptized into the body of Christ to have his sins washed away or forgiven.

The positive believer always has a strong desire to obey God. Can you conceive of a positive believer, in the light of what the Bible teaches, arguing that one does not have to obey the commands of God? The positive believer rejoices to repent because God commands it. He rejoices to confess Jesus Christ because it is commanded. He rejoices to be baptized because it is a commandment of God.

Notice again in Acts 6:7, "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." The faith here is comprehensive of the gospel plan of salvation, meaning that these people believed on Christ, repented of their sins, confessed their faith in Christ and were baptized into His body.

Let us take another example. This time in Acts 18:8, "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." This was a positive faith.

Notice again. In Acts 19:1-6, "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having

passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe," now notice the kind of faith this is, "that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

Can't you see, my friends, that in every example of positive faith the people rendered obedience unto God?

NEGATIVE FAITH

Then there is a negative faith. The negative believer is in a lost condition because his faith is not strong enough to lead him to obey God.

In John 12:42, we read, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue:" now notice, the Bible plainly states that they **believed** on Jesus Christ. If one is saved by just believing, then they were saved even though they would not confess the name of Christ. Can you conceive of people being saved when they refuse to confess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? And yet we are told here that many of the

Pharisees believed on Him, but they would not confess Him. Can't you see that these people believed on Jesus, but their faith was not strong enough to lead them to confess the name of Jesus Christ? They had a negative faith. Every person whose faith is not strong enough to lead him to obey the commands of Christ has a negative faith. To every Bible believer James settles the question concerning the negative faith once and for all. In James 2:14-24, let us observe what James has to say concerning the subject of faith. Listen carefully.

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

So an individual is not saved by faith only. It is true that this letter was written to people who had

already obeyed the gospel, but it is showing that no one can please God without obeying the commands of God. The person outside of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ can only please God by rendering obedience to the commands of God. The person after he obeys the gospel can only please God by continuing to obey the commands of God. Faith without works is dead to every individual in the world, in the church, or out of the church.

Now since the Bible plainly shows that there are two kinds of faith, we want to know what kind of believer is the believer in John 3:16.

I. The believer of John 3:16 comes to God by faith. In Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

II. The believer of John 3:16 has a pure heart. One with an impure heart cannot appreciate God's truths. In Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." God's plan of salvation is easily understood, but God never intended for the man with an impure heart to understand his great truths. In Acts 15:9, "And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."

So we are told here that even the heart is purified by faith. The person with a pure heart has a strong desire to do what God commands him to do. We must always keep in mind that only the pure in heart will see God. In I Peter 1:22, Peter said, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren,

see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

III. The believer of John 3:16 is one whose faith works by love. In Galatians 5:6, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Notice, it is a faith that works by love. If there were no other verse in the Bible on the subject of faith, this verse would be enough to teach that a dead, inactive faith will not save. Remember it is a faith that works.

In Romans 10:10, "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

So when we truly love God, we want to obey the commands of God. In I John 5:3, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

How can anyone teach that it is not necessary for an individual to keep the commands of God! How can anyone who has casually read the Bible teach that one is saved at the point of believing! The Bible clearly teaches that one's faith must lead him to obey God.

In John 14:15, Jesus Christ said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." And in John 14:21, Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:" now how could a thing be plainer than that?

Somebody wants to know now who is it in this town that loves the Lord? Jesus Christ would say, "I can tell you. That man who hath my commandments and keepeth them, that is the man who loves me." And in light of this can you believe that a man truly loves God when he says he loves God but refuses to obey the commands of God? Here is a man who says,

"I truly love God, but I do not think it is necessary to obey the commands of God." My friends, it is impossible for this individual to love God. He is just as deceived in his love as were those Pharisees of whom Jesus spoke in John 5:42 when Jesus Christ said, "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." Now notice verse twenty-one again of John 14, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." So the believer then that is saved is the believer whose faith works by love.

IV. The believer of John 3:16 is the believer who is saved by the gospel. In Romans 1:16 Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth: to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

In Mark 16:16 Jesus Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

But someone says, "It doesn't say that he that is not baptized shall be damned." Well, let me give you an illustration: "He that eateth his food and digesteth it shall live, but he who refuses to eat shall die." It would be foolish to say, "He that eateth not his food and digesteth not his food shall die." Because it would be impossible for an individual to digest his food if he didn't eat the food in the first place. So the man would die because of the very fact that he would not eat. And so Jesus Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned." The man is damned because he refuses to believe. If he doesn't believe, he wouldn't be baptized. So he is already condemned because he refuses to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It

would be foolish to say, "That he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned." The Bible uses intelligent language to teach man. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." But the man who refuses to believe is condemned already is the meaning of the verse.

In I Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul said, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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:"

Now, notice, when Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he said, (1) he preached the gospel to them; (2) they had received it; (3) they were standing in it; (4) and they were saved by it. So whatever the gospel is, an individual is saved whenever he obeys it.

In II Thessalonians 1:7-9, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

So there is something about the gospel that must be obeyed and Paul said these people in Corinth had obeyed that gospel. Now let us see what there is about the gospel that must be obeyed.

In Romans 6:16-17, the apostle Paul said, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves

servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey: whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

Now Paul said there was a time when the people were servants of sin, but he said they had obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, now notice it, and then they were made free from sin. **Then** is an adverb of time. They were made free from sin when they rendered obedience to the gospel. Notice that he said in verse 17, "That you have obeyed that form of doctrine." What is that form?

In I Corinthians, the fifteenth chapter, the verse we discussed just a few minutes ago, Paul said, you obeyed the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You have seen the carpenter build a form, and when he finishes the form, he pours the cement into the form. When the cement sets up, he takes away the form, and then the concrete looks like the form. Paul said that as Jesus Christ physically died, man dies to sin. Just as Jesus Christ was buried in the literal grave, man is buried in the watery grave of baptism. Just as Jesus Christ came forth from the grave, man comes forth from the watery grave "to walk in newness of life."

Somebody says, "Brother Black, where do you get all of that?" Well, let us turn to Romans the sixth chapter and read with me carefully:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin:" there is the death: why every alien sinner must stop the love and the practice of sin, that is, he dies to sin. He is separated from sin. There

is the death. Notice, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried," there is your burial; just as Jesus Christ was buried in the grave so we are buried in baptism: "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." What? As Christ was raised up from the dead, man came forth from the watery grave. Yes, that is the death, the burial and the resurrection that every person must obey in order to become a child of God.

OBEDIENT BELIEVER

And the believer of John 3:16 is the believer who has rendered obedience unto God.

There are three things that are characteristic to every believer:

1. He has the power to come to Jesus Christ. In John 6:44, 45, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." So man has the power to come to Jesus Christ and accept His teachings.

2. Man has the power, the believer has the power to become a son of God. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

3. The believer also has the power to overcome. In I John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God

overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

So the believer then of John 3:16 is a believer who is saved by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

V. The believer of John 3:16 is justified by faith. In Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now Paul includes himself here. He says through faith we have peace with God. Now the question is, when did Paul have peace with God? Someone said, "He was saved on the road to Damascus." Well, if he were saved on the road to Damascus, there certainly wasn't any peace in his salvation. For we are told the Lord appeared to him and said, "Arise and go into the city of Damascus and there it shall be told thee what thou must do."

And when Paul went into the city of Damascus we are told that for three days and three nights he was grieving, mourning, praying, repenting. So he didn't have any peace of mind at all (Acts 9:9-19).

But notice in Acts 22:16, Ananias came to him and said, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Paul had peace after his faith led him to obey God and that is the only true peace about which the Bible speaks. It is the positive believer, the man whose faith leads him to obey God. The man who refuses to obey God is not led by faith.

Read, for instance, Hebrews the eleventh chapter and observe how all those great men of God were motivated by faith to obey God.

Let us notice a few examples from Hebrews the

eleventh chapter.

In verse 4, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

In verse 7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

In verse 8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

In verse 17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son."

In verse 24, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."

In verse 27, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

In verse 31, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

And on and on we could go, and every example of people who were saved by faith, it was a faith that led them to obey God.

VI. The believer of John 3:16 is the believer who has remission of sins or has had his sins remitted.

Let us read Acts 10:43-48: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Now

notice. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

In Acts 2:36-41, notice, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

In Acts 22:16, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

So faith led all these people to render obedience to the commands of God.

VII. The believer in John 3:16 is the believer who has been washed in the blood of the Lamb. In Ephesians 1:7, Paul said, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

This is not an example of conversion. It is just simply stating the law of God that our sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ.

When we turn to Acts 2:38 we find somebody obeying that law: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

In Hebrews 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Again this is stating the law of God. Let us find an example of someone obeying it.

In I Peter 3:21, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

In Revelation 1:5, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

Again this is just simply stating the law of God that our sins are washed away in the blood.

Let us turn to Acts 22:16 and see how it is done. When Ananias came to Saul of Tarsus, he said, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

VIII. The believer of John 3:16 is a baptized believer. In Galatians 3:26-27, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

In view of what we have studied do you consider yourself a positive or negative believer? If you are a negative believer, you will see no sense in obeying the commands of God such as, being baptized or meeting on the first day of the week to commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Can you say, "I am that positive believer. I love and respect and obey God's commandments."

WHAT THE CROSS MEANS TO ME

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the most terrible thing ever recorded on the pages of history. According to Matthew the twenty-sixth chapter, Jesus Christ prayed three times that He might escape the death of crucifixion. While He was praying, one could hear the angry mob as they were milling the streets of Jerusalem planning His death. The mob led by Judas Iscariot comes after Him and leads Him away from one mock trial to another. And at every trial they are shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" All night long they mocked Him, and, as far as we know, He was not permitted to sit down, neither was He given food to eat nor water to drink.

The next morning they led Him to Calvary and crucified Him. And even while that hellish mob was crucifying Him, He looked down from the cross and said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." The cross of Jesus Christ should have a great meaning for every Christian.

1. The cross expresses the greatest degree of love ever known to man. The prophets of God, who lived hundreds of years before Christ, with their fiery tongues of oratory, tried to impress upon man's mind the great love that God had for him. But it is not until we read John 3:16 that we can truly understand the great love of God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

I don't think anyone can fully appreciate the

cross until he has a vivid picture of Christ hanging there dying for mortal man. The cross means that I was condemned to die because of my sins. Sin is a terrible thing. Sin is responsible for all sickness, wars, heartaches, death, and other calamities known to mortal man. If there had been no sin, there would have been none of these terrible things.

We are living in an age when the very air we breathe is reeking with blasphemy. We are living in an age when millions believe that might makes right. We are living in an age when we see countries march into small countries, burning, murdering, and destroying. Now all of these things are done because of sin. Sin is as hypocritical as Judas who would betray us to death with a kiss. Sin is as deceitful as Absalom who would do us obeisance and at the same time try to steal our hearts from God. Sin is as treacherous as left-handed Ehud who would extend his right hand in fellowship and with his left hand reach under his coat, get his dagger and plunge it through the stomach.

In Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

I John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Without the cross there is no salvation.

Isaiah 53:5, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

I Peter 1:18-19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

2. The cross means that the blood of animals could not save me. In fact, the blood of animals never did save anyone at anytime or anywhere. Listen to Paul as he writes in Hebrews 10:1-4, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sin. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."

Hebrews 9:19-22, "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people. Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

All people in heaven will be there because of the blood of Christ. This will be true of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All those people who lived during the Patriarchal Age, the Jewish Age, and also this age of the world, who die in covenant relationship with God, will be in heaven because of the blood of Christ.

We should sing, preach and talk more about the blood of Christ. It is through His blood that our lives are kept clean.

In I John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another,

and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

3. The cross means my morality cannot save me. If man could be saved by only living a good moral life, then it would not have been necessary for Jesus to die on the cross. I know that it is generally taught by religious teachers that if a man lives what the world calls a good moral life, that is, if he pays his debts, meets his obligations and is a law-abiding citizen, all is well with this person because he is a good moral man.

My friends, reason with me for just a moment. Don't you know that there were good moral men before Christ lived on this earth? Man lived on the earth about 4,000 years before Christ died. Certainly there were good moral men who lived during those 4,000 years. Now let us grant for just a moment that the only thing a person has to do to go to heaven is to live a good moral life. There were good moral men who lived before Christ. According to this theory, they were saved.

Now why did Jesus die? Well, someone says, "Jesus died for the sins of mankind." The very fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world proves beyond all doubt that man could not be saved by living a good moral life. It is true that one must have good morals to be saved. But in addition to his good morals, it takes the blood of Jesus Christ.

In Acts 10:1-2 we read of a good moral man by the name of Cornelius. Now notice some outstanding things about this man: (1) he was a devout man; (2) he feared God with all his house; (3) he gave much alms to feed the poor; (4) he prayed to God always.

Brother, where could you find a better man than that? We are told in verse forty-eight that Cornelius

was told to be baptized. Why? That he might come in contact with the blood of Jesus Christ. For without the blood there is no remission of sins for anyone in any age of the world.

4. The cross means that I should be crucified with Christ. Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Have you ever wondered how this great man of God could carry on his work in the face of trials, heartaches and disappointments? When the enemies of Christianity would take him and beat him across his back until his shoulder blades looked like white caps in a sea of blood, he would get up and go on his mission of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why? Because he was sustained by the glorious hope that was given to him by the death of Jesus on the cross.

In Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

As I travel over the nation preaching the gospel many people ask, "Brother Black, what is the most needed thing in the Lord's church today?" I would think one of the most needed things in the average congregation of the Lord's people today is a great crucifixion of the world by members of the church. No man is strong enough, brave enough, nor smart enough to live the Christian life without being crucified to the world. Let me ask you. Have you been crucified to the world?

This is the reason we have so many problems

in the local congregation. So many members have their names on the roll book, but they have never been crucified with Christ to the world. They are attempting to serve God, and at the same time they are serving the world. And they have made themselves believe that this is acceptable in the sight of God. Carlyle would call this, "The hypocrisy that does not know itself to be hypocritical."

Our hands are to be crucified to the world. They may be active in serving our fellow man. In Ecclesiastes 9:10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

In John 9:4, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

When our hands are crucified, we will be careful what we handle. We should never handle anything that will stain them with sin. We are to use our hands to promote good works. Yes, our hands are to be dead to sin but alive to every good work. And whatsoever good deeds they find to perform they should do them zealously.

Our feet are to be crucified that we will not walk in the ways of the world. Our feet should carry us to the needy, to the poor, and to those who have never heard the gospel of our Lord. Christ wants this gospel to go into all the world, and somebody's feet must go to carry the gospel. We sing the song, "Take my feet and let them be, swift and beautiful for thee."

In Romans 10:15, "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

Have your feet been crucified that you can carry the gospel to the lost?

Our ears must be crucified that we will not listen to gossip. Why do so many turn a deaf ear to God's plan of salvation? It is because their ears have not been crucified to the doctrines of men. When one has his ears crucified, he never rejoices in hearing things bad about others. And when he hears them, he does not repeat them because his ears have been crucified to filthy gossip. His ears are crucified to the advice of Satan.

In Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

II Timothy 4:3, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." These were people whose ears had never been crucified to the world.

Our eyes must be crucified. There are so many things of the world that appeal to the eyes. Look at the advertisements on T. V. Look at the billboards as you travel the highways. The motto of every Christian should be, "Always look up and don't dare look down." We should keep our eyes on the Lord at all times. Peter did not sink until he took his eyes off the Lord. When a Christian has his eyes crucified, he sees the good, the pure, and puts the very best interpretation on all things because his eyes have been crucified to the world. The person whose eyes are not crucified sees the bad in everything.

Our tongue must be crucified. Job 6:24, "Teach

me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred." Think of all the hearts that have been broken because someone said some ugly, mean, hateful thing about some other person. A Christian does not rejoice when he hears something bad about someone else. If he does hear it, he does not repeat it. Why? His tongue has been crucified. James 3:2-10, "For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature: and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame: it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

5. The cross means that I should be dedicated to Christ. It was the dedication that Christ had for His Father that led Him to the cross.

John 4:34, "Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."

Matthew 26:39, "And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

When we realize how dedicated Christ was to His Father, we should rejoice to present our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable in His sight. Now we can appreciate more fully why Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Jesus Christ." Paul could have gloried in his ancestry. Paul could have gloried in his mighty intellect. And oh, what a powerful intellectual man he was, but he never gloried in this. He could have gloried in his works. There has never been a man who ever graced this earth who accomplished more than the apostle Paul other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But Paul never gloried in his works. He could have gloried in the things he wrote. He wrote just about all the books of the New Testament. But he did not glory in any of these things. He simply said, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Someone wrote these words:

*When Jesus came to Golgatha they hanged Him on
a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet,
and made a Calvary.
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red
were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human
flesh was cheap.
When Jesus came to our town, they simply passed
Him by,
They never hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him
die.*

*For men have grown more tender, and they would
not give Him pain,
They just passed down the street, and left
Him in the rain.
Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them, for they know
not what they do!"
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched
Him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets
without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for
Calvary.*

(author unknown)

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

In Matthew 12:41-45 we read these words: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

These words were spoken when the Jews refused to believe that Jesus Christ cast out evil spirits by the power of God. We have a greater appreciation for this text when we understand the context. The context shows that Christ was describing the sinful condition of the Jewish nation.

When I read these words I always think of a haunted house. When I was a little boy, it was common to hear people, as they sat around the open fireplace at night, tell of certain houses in the country that were haunted. They would say, "You can hear water dripping; doors squeaking; windows shaking; chains rattling; far away voices; women screaming, and

many other strange noises." They would say that no one would buy the house or spend the night there. Well, I don't blame them. I would not want to sleep there in that kind of house myself.

Jesus had told the Jews that the men of Nineveh would rise in judgment of this generation and would condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And, "behold a greater than Jonah is here." Why would the Ninevites condemn these Jews in the judgment?

1. The Ninevites were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. Yet, they heard Jonah. The Jews were God's promised people and yet they refused to hear Jesus Christ.

2. The people of Nineveh heard but one preacher, and they obeyed and changed their lives. The Jews had heard many prophets and Christ Himself and had refused to believe and change their lives.

3. The Ninevites believed Jonah without any signs. The Jews sought many signs daily and still refused to believe Jesus Christ.

4. No one had ever foretold the Ninevites anything concerning Jonah. Yet when he came, they believed and obeyed him. All the prophets foretold the Jews about Jesus Christ, yet when He came, they would not believe Him.

5. The Ninevites heeded the warnings of Jonah even though he threatened the destruction of the city. The Jews would not hear Jesus Christ even though He preached grace and salvation.

6. Jonah was not mocked or derided by the Ninevites even though he had fled when God told him to go there. But the Jews scoffed and mocked Jesus Christ who was always obedient to His Father's will.

Jesus also said to them, "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

1. She went notwithstanding the distance. The Jews had in their very midst the Lord Jesus Christ and showed no appreciation for Him.

2. She went even though she had a very busy schedule. The Jews were not willing to make any effort or sacrifice to sit at the feet and learn of Jesus Christ.

3. She came to see Solomon even though she was uninvited as far as we know. They refused to come to Jesus Christ even though He extended to them daily the invitation saying, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

4. She went to hear a fallible man. They refused to hear the infallible Son of God.

There is a great lesson for us in this parable. We learn that no man can reform his life by just casting out evil. Our minds and our lives must be filled with hopes and emotions and positive actions. We cannot live in a vacuum. We must do good, or evil will take over. We must be active in living the Christian life, or our lives will become stagnant and breed spiritual insects.

Many people make a failure of living the Christian life because their conception of Christianity is solely a negative conception. How many times have we, as ministers, talked to some unfaithful church member, and he says, "I don't lie; I don't steal; I don't curse, etc." This person thinks everything is well with him because of this negative conception of Christianity.

It is not enough for one to stop cursing, he must start praying. It is not enough for one to stop hating, he must begin to love. It is not enough for one to come out of darkness, he must fill his life with light. It is not enough for one to stop reading filthy literature, he must begin to read wholesome literature. It is not enough to quit bad habits, one must develop new and good habits. Every member of the church needs to learn the lesson of being active in the vineyard of the Lord.

The one-talent man that Christ tells about in Matthew 25, no doubt, was a good moral man. He was honest. He did not steal nor misuse his talent. He was a negative thinker, and he buried his talent.

In my mind I can see this one-talent man participating in a business meeting. He talks after this fashion: "We can't do this, or we can't do that; we don't know what the future holds; there may be a depression; we'd better be careful; brethren, I'll tell you: I am just afraid!" These people who talk like this think they are pleasing to God by doing nothing. But Christ forever condemns this theory of doing nothing in the parable of the talents.

I. ISRAEL WAS A POSSESSED NATION

Jesus had these people in mind no doubt when

He spoke these words. During the time the Jews were unfaithful to God, they were carried away into Babylonian captivity, where they labored, toiled, and perspired under the cruel yoke of bondage for seventy years. They never worshipped idols again. The Catholics may convert others to idolatry, but not the Jews. They learned their lesson the hard way. They had quit idolatry. They had given this up, but this was not enough. Yes, they had done a good job of casting out idolatry but had permitted self-righteousness, bitterness, easy divorce, hatred of Christ, covetousness and many other sins to fill the vacuum that was made by the casting out of idolatry.

II. FALSE MASTERS OF THE SOUL

No life really remains empty of worship. All people worship something or someone. If faith does not work in the soul, it drifts toward infidelity. We cannot serve two masters. Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

We are either working for Christ, or we are working against Christ. There is no neutrality in loyalty to our Lord. We are all slaves to someone or to something. Many people boast of freedom, yet they are slaves to tobacco or alcohol or to society's norm. Many are slaves to food and become gluttonous people.

There was an individual walking down the street with a sign hanging across his chest that said, "I am a fool for Christ's sake." People would pass him, look at the sign, and wonder what kind of man he was. And

as they passed him, they would turn to look back. And across his back there was another sign which said, "Whose fool are you?"

Yes, we are all fools for somebody's sake, even for Christ, some individual, or the world. Romans 6:16, "Know yet not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey: whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"

Oh yes, we all serve somebody.

III. AN EMPTY HOUSE INVITES STRANGERS

One can do a fair job of cleaning his house, then lock all the windows and doors, and it seems that the house is sealed off from the world.

This man takes his family, goes on an extended vacation, and stays possibly for six months. He comes home and what does he find? Not a clean house, but dust, insects and spider webs. What happened? The house was empty, and the little strangers took over.

One may take a beautiful field, clean every weed from it, walk off, leave it, and then in a short while the weeds take control. Then mice, snakes and insects live among the weeds. What is wrong with the field? There is no one to cultivate it. What is wrong with the house? No one lives there.

When we cease to cultivate good habits, good deeds and Christian activities in our lives, we become no more than a spiritual haunted house.

IV. POSITIVE LIVING

It takes positive living to please God. Many, no doubt, think they will be saved by what they don't do.

One says, "I don't lie; I don't steal; I don't cheat, etc." Well, this could be said of a mannequin or a dummy. As we have emphasized, it is not enough to just stop doing evil; we must do good. There is a place for negative living, but there is also a place for positive living. The law of Christ puts great emphasis upon positive living. Every judgment parable shows that man was lost not for violating law but for failure to grow and to practice positive living.

The rich man, for instance, did not beat Lazarus as far as we know. He did not sick the dogs on him or mistreat him. He just ignored him. The rich man left God out of his life.

The Christian attitude is doing, being, going, active. James 4:17, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

A negative religion is not enough. The only permanent cure for negative action is Christian living. As we stand in the pulpit and tell people what they can't do, we must also tell them what they must do.

The easiest way to drive darkness out of a room is to turn on the light. One may take a stick and fight for a lifetime, but he can never drive the darkness out of the room. When the light is turned on, the darkness disappears. When we only use religion to drive evil out of our lives, we have a false conception of Christianity. After the bad deeds are driven from our lives, we must replace the evil deeds with good deeds.

V. WHAT TAKES PLACE AT BAPTISM?

When the alien sinner hears the gospel, Mark 12:29, "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is

one Lord", then the alien sinner is to believe. Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Then the alien sinner is to repent of his sins. Luke 13:3, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He is to be baptized into Christ. Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

At this point in a person's life, that is, when he hears, believes, repents, confesses and is baptized, in the act of baptism all of the evil bad deeds are driven from his life. When this person comes forth from the water, he is as pure and as white as the driven snow. At this time there is a vacuum or an emptiness in this person's life. It is for this reason this child of God must begin immediately to read the Bible, pray, attend services of the church, visit the sick, and help the poor. What is taking place? He is filling this vacuum with good deeds. And when he does this, then the evil is driven from his life. But the Jews did not do this. Jesus Christ said, "You are in a worse state now than you were in the beginning."

VI. WHEN DOES OUR SPIRITUAL HOUSE BECOME A HAUNTED HOUSE?

1. When we fail to appreciate the love of God.
 - (a) God's love is seen in that he has redeemed us. Isaiah 43:1, "But now saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by

thy name; thou art mine."

I Peter 1:18-19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

There was brought before Oliver Cromwell a deserter, and the stern old commander without a moment's hesitation condemned the deserter to die. The execution was set for twilight of the same day. The man's sweetheart went to Cromwell and pleaded for a stay of execution. This was military law, and no one could overthrow it. When the church bell rang that night, the man must die.

The young woman went to the old village sexton who rang the curfew at twilight every day. He was partially deaf, and when she made him understand that she did not want him to ring the bell, the old sexton said, "For many years I have rung the bell, and at twilight I shall ring it again."

This young girl climbed up into the bell tower, wrapped her warm hands around the iron tongue of the bell and swung out over the city. The deaf old sexton rang the curfew unaware that the bell had been muffled, and Cromwell's soldiers were waiting in vain to carry out the order of execution.

Cromwell sent to inquire why the bell had not rung. They brought the girl before him with her crushed, bleeding and broken hands. Cromwell said to the young girl, "Your love has saved this worthless deserter."

We must always keep in mind that we deserted

our God and through the blood of Christ we have been redeemed. Thank God for such a redemption!

(b) God's love is seen in that he called us by His name. Acts 11:26, "And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

Acts 26:28, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

I Peter 4:16, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."

2. When we forget the object of our faith.

So many times in this life we give up because we look at the problem instead of the Lord, who is the solution to all our problems. This was Peter's mistake. When he took his eyes off the Lord, he could only see danger, and therefore Peter was looking at the problem in view of his own strength. Without the Lord none of us is able to successfully live the Christian life. But with the help of the Lord, the weakest of all men can live the Christian life if he keeps his eyes on the Lord and continues to trust Him. We need to wait upon the Lord and to trust Him (Psalm 27:14; Isaiah 30:15).

3. When the glory of God departs from our lives.

In I Samuel the fourth chapter, we read of

the Israelites going to battle against the Philistines. And in this battle we are told there were about four thousand of the soldiers of Israel who were killed. When this sad news was brought home and the army discussed the reason they lost so many men, they decided it was because they did not have the Ark of the Covenant with them.

Oh, how foolish people can be in their reasoning! It is about like members of the church who say, "As long as I can eat the Lord's Supper, everything is fine."

So the Israelites sent over to Shiloh to get the Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought into their midst, they shouted for joy to the extent that even the enemies heard them.

Then they went to battle again and took the Ark of the Covenant with them. And Eli sent his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to guard the Ark of the Covenant. But this time there were thirty thousand of the soldiers killed in one of the most terrible slaughters the world has ever known in the course of one battle.

When the messengers came to the city to tell the news, mothers and fathers started weeping for their children.

Eli, an old man ninety-eight years old, was sitting on a stool at the gate. When he heard the crying, he asked, "Why all the mourning?" Then the messenger brought him the news of the battle and told him thirty thousand men had been slain including Eli's two sons. The messenger also told Eli that the Ark of the Covenant had been taken by the enemy. This was too much for the old man, so he fell from the stool and died from a broken neck.

The messenger then went to the wife of Phinehas to tell her what had taken place. She was with

child and the Bible says, "near to be delivered." When she heard the Ark of God had been taken and that her husband and father-in-law were dead, she went into labor.

She gave birth to a son, and before she died she said to those who were standing about her, "I want you to call his name Ichabod because the glory of God has departed from Israel."

God wants us to live active, fruitful lives, and when we do this, we are what God wants us to be. So every Christian should desire to obey God to the very best of his ability so that his spiritual life will never become a spiritual haunted house.

IS YOUNG ABSALOM SAFE?

David was a great man and a great king over Israel. There has possibly never been a more penitent person than David. He made some great mistakes in his life, but he was always very penitent.

The book of Psalms records many of the prayers that David prayed confessing his weaknesses and asking for God's forgiveness. One evidence of the inspiration of the Bible is the impartiality of the writers. If the Bible had been written by uninspired men, only the good things would be told about a man like David. The Bible tells us the bad and the good about the characters in the Bible.

Let us observe some things about Absalom.

I. ABSALOM HAD GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

In the first place he was the son of a king. He was the son of a good king and a great king. If he had taken advantage of this, he no doubt would have gone down in history as one of the great men of all ages. But Absalom threw away this opportunity as we have seen other people do in life. How sad it is to see a young man with so many opportunities and then refuse to take advantage of them. Not one person out of a million ever had more advantages than Absalom.

II. ABSALOM WAS A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN

"But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no

blemish in him" (II Samuel 14:25).

This could have been a great natural asset and advantage to him if he had been a godly man. Since Absalom was an ungodly person, no doubt, his good looks contributed to his downfall.

III. ABSALOM HAD A GOOD PERSONALITY

In II Samuel 15:2-6, "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him. See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

It would not have been possible for one to have done what Absalom did without a very unusual, outgoing, dynamic personality. One must remember that David was a great man, a good man, a very influential king. And yet this young man Absalom was able to steal the affections that the people had for King David, his own father. A wonderful personality is a great asset to a righteous man but to an ungodly person it can be a great liability. It was a great liability to Absalom.

IV. ABSALOM WAS A LIAR

He would say to the people, "There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." This was untrue, and it was said to poison the minds of the people against the king. He also said, "If I were made judge in the land, every man would get justice." This was said to reflect on his father King David. Absalom cared nothing about justice or righteousness. He had only one thing in mind, and that was to become king of Israel at any cost, even to the killing of his own father.

V. ABSALOM WAS A HYPOCRITE

He was as hypocritical as Judas Iscariot who would betray us to death with a kiss. He pretended to his father that he wanted to go to Hebron to pay his vow to God. He deceived his father because he went there to prepare for war against his own father and to take the throne if possible.

II Samuel 15:10, "But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel." Absalom headed a conspiracy that was very powerful. In fact, it was so strong that a messenger came to David and said, "The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." I have often thought how this must have broken David's heart to know that his own son had been able to turn the people of Israel against him.

VI. ABSALOM WAS A RUTHLESS YOUNG MAN

Even his father feared him. David had reared Absalom and knew him. David had a great fear of

Absalom for he knew he was a cold-blooded man. If the average father should be told that his son was going to declare war on him or take what he had, he would say, "Let me go to my son and talk with him." He would have no fear of his life. He would be glad to talk with the son. He would meet his son anywhere on any occasion at any time. But remember, David was afraid of Absalom. Why? Because he knew Absalom. When David heard the word that Absalom had headed a conspiracy to take the throne from him, he said, "Make speed to depart, lest we be overtaken suddenly and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword." II Samuel 16:11, "Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life." How sad for a father to confess, "My own son is seeking to kill me!"

VII. ABSALOM WAS A VERY IMMORAL MAN

He was not only immoral, but he was completely unashamed of his immorality. In fact, I think Absalom was proud of his immoral life. Let us read II Samuel 16:22; listen carefully; "So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel."

Can you conceive of such a thing? This ungodly man actually went in unto his father's concubines before all the people who wanted to see. Now this is the man who stole the hearts of all Israel.

VIII. ABSALOM DROVE HIS FATHER FROM JERUSALEM

David loved Jerusalem. He loved the people and

had served them well. If some enemies had come in from a foreign country and had driven David from Jerusalem, this we could understand. But he was being driven from Jerusalem by his own son, his own flesh and blood. How sad!

II Samuel 15:30, "And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

In my mind I can see that old man ascending Mt. Olivet, no shoes on his feet, his head covered and crying his heart out over a wayward son.

IX. ABSALOM DECLARED WAR ON HIS FATHER

When time came for the battle, David wanted to go for he was a great warrior. But the people would not permit David to go. They said, "Thou art worth ten thousand of us. If one of us or several of us were killed it would not matter, but thou art a great man, a great king. We do not want you to go to battle. You stay here. We will go and fight."

I can hear David say to those men, "If you are not willing for me to go to battle, and if you are going to fight against my son, I will stay behind if you will deal gently with the young man Absalom."

Oh, what a father's love! Even though his son was treacherous, rebellious, trying to take his throne, threatening to kill him, David's love for his son was there in his heart, and he said, "Deal gently with my son."

The men did not say what they would or would not do. Joab, who was a dear friend of David, knew what he was going to do if he got the opportunity.

David was told that Ahithophel whom he trusted was betraying him and was advising Absalom how to defeat David. At this point, David prayed to God and asked God to turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness. David's prayer was answered.

Ahithophel advised Absalom to give him 12,000 men, and he would capture and kill David. The saying pleased Absalom, but he said, "I would like to hear what Hushai the Archite has to say." Hushai was an answer to David's prayer. Hushai advised Absalom to go to battle "in thine own person." Absalom took this advice. He went to battle, and while he rode upon a mule, the mule went under the thick bows of a great oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth.

Joab was told where Absalom was hanging, and he went where Absalom was, took three darts in his hand and thrust them through Absalom's heart while he was yet alive. They took Absalom down and cast him into a great pit and covered his body with stones.

The messenger went to tell David, but before he could tell David the bad news, David asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Isn't it interesting to observe that David did not ask about the battle. He did not ask how many of his own men had been killed. But his question was, "Is the young man Absalom safe?", showing his great concern and love for this rebellious son. The messenger said, "David, your son Absalom has been killed, and all is well in Israel."

When David heard those words, we are told in II Samuel 18:33, "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and

as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

In my mind I can see this old man climbing the stairs, wringing his hands, crying his heart out and saying over and over, "O Absalom, my son, if I could have died in your place, O Absalom, my son, my son, O my son, Absalom!"

Here is a true account of a wasted life. Absalom could have been a great king, but he wasted his life. Absalom had no doubt thought of the time he would be a great king. He possibly thought when he died there would be a great state funeral, and all the nations would mourn his passing. He no doubt thought that coming generations would pass by his tomb and say, "Here lies Absalom, one of the greatest kings to ever reign over Israel." But instead of lying in a marble mausoleum, his body that was so handsome was thrown into a pit, covered with stones, and no one to mourn his death but a broken-hearted father who had made a failure in rearing Absalom.

I have thought that if David's love for Absalom had been as wise and watchful as it was fond and foolish, he would have noticed Absalom's first wayward step and would not have waited until he raised his hand in rebellion. At this time it was too late to help Absalom.

IS YOUR ABSALOM SAFE?

1. He is not safe when he is petted and spoiled under this modern so-called psychology method of rearing children which means, don't restrain, don't correct, and don't whip. I don't know what philosophy David had in rearing Absalom. He was a very

busy man. He was king over Israel. It may have been he just didn't have time for Absalom. It may have been he did not sit down and talk with him as a father. It may have been that his philosophy was don't restrain, don't rebuke, don't whip. I really don't know, but there is one thing I can say about this modern child training; it is the best way I know to make a little, mean, ornery brat out of a child.

Let me read to you what the Bible says about rearing children.

In Proverbs 19:18, "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying."

Proverbs 13:24, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."

Proverbs 23:13, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die."

Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child: but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

I Samuel 3:13, "For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

2. He is not safe when he is involved in sinful, worldly entertainment and recreation. It is sad indeed when parents do not know where their children are day or night. If your children do not obey you while they are young, you may be sure that they will not obey you when they are older. If they are not taught to obey and respect the laws of the land while young, in all probability, they will not respect and obey the laws of the land when they grow to adulthood.

I Corinthians 15:33, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."

3. He is not safe when spiritual training is neglected. When parents fail to take their children to Bible study and other activities, they will years later shed rivers of penitential tears. "Too late, too late" will be written on the tombstones of many young people. Oh, if I could just get all parents to see the importance of taking their children to all church services when possible. Children who are taken to church activities consistently are very seldom, if ever, involved with the law during their lifetime. It seems that if parents loved their children this would be enough to motivate them to put forth whatever efforts are necessary to see that their children attend Bible study and other services of the church. Some parents never learn until it is too late. But what an awful price they pay after it is too late!

Deuteronomy 6:7-9, "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."

Ephesians 6:4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

II Timothy 1:5, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also."

Someone has written these words. I do not know the author.

*"Is it so far from thee
Thou canst no longer see
In the chamber over the gate
The old man desolate,
Weeping and wailing sore
For his son who is no more?
Oh, Absalom, my son.*

*Somewhere at every hour
The watchman on the tower
Looks forth and sees the fleet
Approach of hurrying feet
Of messengers, that bear
The tidings of despair.
Oh, Absalom, my son.*

*That 'tis the common grief
That bringeth slight relief
Ours is the bitterest loss.
Ours is the heaviest cross.
And forever the cry will be
Would God that I had died for thee.
Oh, Absalom, my son."*

Mrs. Gayle Oler wrote the following:

*"Somehow I lost you, son along the way . . .
I don't know just how it came to be.
I only know that you were mine one day,
Then suddenly you slipped away from me.
Did I say suddenly? I do you wrong,
For not in rash decision did you go,
Setting yourself in anger, pushed along
By overwhelming force, or undertow
No, it was gradual, your craft was new,
And I left you alone to try it out,
I walked the shoreline for awhile,
And you held to your course with confidence, no doubt.
But, when the night grew chill, I went inside,
Leaving you, son, alone with the wind and with the tide."*

THE LOCAL CONGREGATION AND I

Every member is important in the work of the church. There is a place for the rich and poor, educated and uneducated, one-talent and the five-talent man. The word church is used in two different senses in the New Testament.

1. It is used in the universal sense. Matthew 16:18, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Ephesians 1:22-23, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

These verses are not talking about the local congregation but the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ which includes all local congregations.

2. The word church is used in the local sense. I Corinthians 1:1-2, "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

I Thessalonians 1:1, "Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Abraham Lincoln said, "I like to see a man proud of the place where he is living, and I like to see a man so live that the place will be proud of him."

It is wonderful for a member of the church to live in a way that he is proud of the church and to conduct himself also in a way that the church is proud of him.

The local church provides so many wonderful blessings for Christians.

1. The Bond of Fellowship is Great

I John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

One of the great joys of living the Christian life is the joy of this wonderful Christian fellowship and the assurance of knowing that our lives are kept clean by the blood of Jesus Christ by walking in the light.

2. Strength of Edification

Acts 9:31, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

The word edify means to build up and to strengthen. Oh, the times in my ministry that I have seen some person brokenhearted because of some sorrow or disappointment he or she had experienced. Some faithful, dedicated Christian will go to this person, put his arms around him and speak kind, encouraging words to this brokenhearted Christian. After the conversation, the person who thought the

whole world was against him has a new outlook on life. What happened? He was edified by another fellow Christian. It is great to be a Christian in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ where we can strengthen, edify, build up and encourage each other.

3. The Joy of Public Worship

Acts 20:7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

David said in Psalm 122:1, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

One of the great joys of living the Christian life is to meet with fellow saints; sing together; pray together; study the Bible together; eat the Lord's Supper together; give of our means together. The faithful child of God does not look upon going to the house of God as a drudgery but a great joy. If you do not get a joy out of meeting with God's saints, then you had better pray to God that He will restore to you the joy of your salvation. There is a great joy in living the Christian life. And if we demonstrated this to the world, it would be so much easier to convert people to the truth.

4. The Balm of Comfort

I Thessalonians 4:18, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

There are so many people whose hearts are bowed down with sorrow. It is a wonderful thing to speak words of comfort to them. Members of the

church have told me of some particular problem they had and then would say, "I could never have made it if it had not been for faithful Christians who were able to comfort me with kind and encouraging words." Every member is important in the work of the church.

I Corinthians 12:14-22, "For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body: is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body: is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary."

Every one in the church cannot be a song leader, nor a deacon, nor an elder, nor a Bible school teacher, but there is a place for every one to work in the local church. Every one should learn what his talent is and then use it to the glory of God.

When the man that received five talents used them, he was blessed by the Lord saying to him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joys of the Lord." He said this same thing to the man who had received the two talents and used them. This shows that the Lord expects the person to use the talent or talents he may have to the glory of God.

I knew a lady who was the janitress for a congregation and worked for the sum of \$15.00 per week. The men had a business meeting and decided since the contribution was down they would ask this lady to give up her job. The men said they would do the maintenance work and save the \$15.00 per week.

When they told this lady that they were going to take her job from her, she said, "If you want to take the money that is perfectly all right but don't take from me the joy of cleaning the building. I cannot read nor write, therefore it is very difficult for me to talk to people about the Bible and tell them what to do to be saved, but I can clean this building as well as anybody." She was using her talent to the glory of God.

If all members would use their talents to the glory of God, the church would be doing everything that God wants it to do. Every member owes a great debt to the church. We owe a debt of loyalty to the local church. The church would make tremendous growth in any community if the members were loyal.

Who is responsible for the Sunday night service, for instance? Or Wednesday night Bible study? Or a gospel meeting? Many members seem to assume no responsibility concerning these matters. Why? They are not loyal to Christ. In the first place, it is foolish to expect one to be faithful to the services of the Lord when the individual is disloyal to Christ.

It is disturbing to know that so many members show no interest in the work of the church. We have almost galvanized indifference into respectability. Yet the Bible condemns indifference with a severity that the Lord very seldom used in condemning sin.

Someone will say, "He is a real good man, he is just indifferent." Well, what about this? "She is a real

good lady, she is just a prostitute!" or, "He is a real good man, he is just a thief!" No, we would not dare say that about these people because we recognize prostitution and thievery as terrible sins. But indifference is a sin that is doing far more harm to the Lord's church than prostitution and thievery combined.

Yet a great number of members look upon indifference as a respectable act. What has this modern society done to us? Let us read Revelation 3:16, "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Where can we find language stronger than this used in the Bible?

As I travel over the nation preaching in gospel meetings, brethren often ask, "What is wrong with the church? Why are we not evangelizing the world and growing locally as we ought to grow?"

I don't know what all is wrong, but I know basically what is wrong. We have far too many members attempting to serve God who have never been crucified to the world. We need a great crucifixion in the church.

Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

This explains how Paul could suffer so much for Christ. He had been crucified to the world. No one is strong enough, smart enough nor good enough to live the Christian life until he has been crucified to the

world. When we are crucified to the world, then and only then are we in a position to be loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every member should pledge a spirit of cooperation to the local church. Every member should say, "I will cooperate with the preacher; I will cooperate with the elders; I will cooperate with the building program; I will cooperate in building a great Bible school; I will cooperate in our gospel meetings; I will cooperate in the visitation program."

When we are busy cooperating, we are not sitting on the side line criticizing those who are working. Many members of the church remind me of spectators at a football game. Have you ever observed how those sitting in the bleachers will shout, scream and criticize those who are playing? You know why they are criticizing? They are not doing anything. They are just observers. Surely you, as a member of the church, can make the application. There is an old saying, "You can't kick while you are pulling, and you can't pull while you are kicking."

As a member of a particular congregation I have an obligation to cooperate. No, it is not optional. Acts 4:23-25, "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?"

Notice it says, "They lifted up their voice to God with one accord." This is a spirit of cooperation that should characterize every child of God. Oh, we can not, in all probability, conceive of the potential

strength of the Lord's church if every member would cooperate and assume his responsibility in the work of the church. There would be such a tremendous growth that we would stand amazed and say as did they in Mark 2:12, "We never saw it on this fashion."

We should pledge to attend all services unless providentially hindered. And we should not abuse and misuse the word providential. Many no doubt have confused providence with unfaithfulness. There is a great difference.

While preaching in a gospel meeting in one of the northern states, I took the evening meal with an Italian couple. While eating I asked, "How did you come in contact with the church?"

The lady said, "The day we moved into this house the lady next door came over and brought food. She invited us to attend church services with her. We did not go with her for several weeks. Every time I talked to this lady she would invite me to attend church with her. She was never ugly nor unkind but always very patient and considerate when she extended her invitation.

"The invitations didn't mean much to me so I began to observe her. She attended all the services. I shall never forget one Sunday a big snow had fallen and I thought to myself that she would not go that night.

"About 5:30 p.m., I went to my bedroom window and pulled the draperies back so I could see her. Really it was ugly of me, but I was hoping she would not go. Then I would know she was not so conscientious about going to every service.

"In a few minutes this lady came out of her house with her small children, got into her car and drove to the services. It was then that I decided to go

with her when she asked me again.

"I did go with her, learned the truth, and obeyed the gospel."

Oh, it is so important to attend all services. Remember, your neighbor is watching you. Suppose there is a gospel meeting in progress, and you do not attend. Your neighbors observe your indifference. Who knows but on that awful day of judgment God may hold you responsible for that person being lost. For God may know that person would have obeyed the gospel if the person had been given an opportunity.

Listen, my friends, forsaking the assembly may be far more serious than many have ever realized. Read and study seriously Hebrews 10:25-29.

How do you really think of yourself as a member of the Lord's church:

1. A power or a problem?
2. An attender or an absentee?
3. A servant or a shirker?
4. A giver or a getter?
5. A supporter or a sleeper?
6. A helper or a hinderer?

In conclusion let me say all of us are going to give an account to God. God will not hold us responsible for those people who lived before we were born, nor will He hold us responsible for those who will live after we are dead. But we are responsible for the people who live while we are living. To what degree God will hold us responsible for these people who have never obeyed the gospel during our lifetime, I don't know, but surely to some degree.

Read, for instance, and study carefully Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:19; Romans 10:13-16; Luke 12:47-48.

We must remember there is a day of reckoning for all men. If a man possesses Christ, Christ's word and Christ's church, he is heir to all blessings of God. But if he refuses, he must give an account to God on the day of judgment.

A faithful, dedicated child of God was dying. He could not talk, but before he died, he pointed toward heaven and then gave the victory sign.

Brother or sister, could you make that same sign?

RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY

One of the saddest verses in the Bible is found in Judges 21:25 that says, "In those days there was no king in Israel: Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible because it was at a time when the spiritual condition of God's people was at a low ebb. Every man became a law unto himself. He had no respect for anyone, nor for any order, nor for any system except his own ideas and his own thoughts. Of course, this was a tragedy.

We are living in an age of the world when to some degree these very words are being fulfilled even in the country in which we live, in our homes, in the civil government, and to some degree even in the church of our Lord.

We need to recognize that all scriptural authority emanates from God. In Exodus the 20th chapter, God spoke to Moses and said, "Thou shalt remember that I am the Lord thy God that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and thou shalt have no other gods before me." He is the source of all power. He is the source of all authority. And, this is to be recognized and accepted. Where this is recognized and accepted, then all is in harmony with God's system. Where this is not recognized, then there is trouble and disorder.

The Lord Jesus Christ had all authority delegated to Him. He was not the source of authority, it was delegated to Him. In Matthew 28:18 the Bible says, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Even everything that has been created has been subject to the law and the power of the authority of God, even the inanimate things of the world. Everything is ultimately subjected to God's power, to God's rule, to God's authority. Even the sun that shines is subjected to the authority of God. The stars, the earth, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, everything that lives, everything that exists, all are subject to the authority of God.

So God is not dead; God is not even sick. God is just as powerful today as He was in the beginning when He created the heavens and the earth.

The very fact that there are rebels, the very fact that man rejects God, the very fact that man repudiates the word of God, none of these things mean that God has lost His authority. The very fact that man is more rebellious now than he was fifty years ago does not mean that God is weakening in His power or His authority. It just simply means that man, by his nature, has become more depraved and will ultimately suffer the terrible consequences of his rebellious attitude.

There is a great disrespect for authority in this age of the world. We usually think of preachers talking along these lines. Many times when preachers are talking about these things, I have an idea that there are those sitting in the pew who are possibly saying, "Well, this week he has been reading something about authority. It is just preacher talk!"

WHAT MEN OF THE WORLD SAY

I want to read to you a report from the *U. S. News and World Report*, by Henry Taylor. He said,

"There is a national crisis in crime in this country. In my opinion based on thirty years of police work, this country is in real trouble. In thousands upon thousands of instances the parents are at fault. There is a worsening breakdown of the family unit. It is in the home that respect for authority must take place. There is disrespect for parents, disrespect, or the result of the disrespect, for policemen, and disrespect in general."

Do you have any idea of the condition of this country today? Every twenty-four hours these are some of the things that take place in our country. There are thirteen thousand seven hundred and eighty-five arrests every twenty-four hours. There are one thousand three hundred eighteen divorces granted every twenty-four hours. There are two hundred forty-one sentenced to the penitentiary. There are four thousand three hundred twenty burglaries. There are five hundred thirty-three robberies every twenty-four hours. There are seventy people who kill themselves every twenty-four hours. There are one thousand two hundred people who become problem drinkers.

All this, of course, is a sad commentary upon the society in which we live. Now this is where we are rearing our children. It is in this country we are meeting to worship. This is the country we are trying to improve. You parents who have small children, this is the country in which you are rearing them.

We are told organized crime in America is increasing six times faster than the population. If something isn't done, what will it be like thirty years from now if crime is increasing six times faster year by year than the population? There may be a time when we do not have enough policemen to protect us. There

may be a time instead of people cursing the policemen or wanting to throw rocks and hurl bottles at them, these people may be praying for more policemen. We say it is dangerous to get out on the street, but if something isn't done, it is going to be dangerous to even be at home. When people want to walk into your house, knock down the door, take what you have, they may do that because they may feel that it is right as far as they are concerned.

I heard a person, a few days ago on T. V., advocating that it was right for people to refuse to work, and that everybody ought to refuse to work. If there is something that somebody else has, then take part of it, if he doesn't want to give it to you. We are living in an age when it is fast becoming the rule of the day that every man will become a law unto himself. We are told that over thirty billion dollars are spent on crime in this country every year. So you can see that America is sick. Any person who doesn't see that America is sick indicates to me that that person himself is sick. Why of course this country is sick, and it is based primarily on the fact that we have lost respect for authority.

We are living in a terrible age of the world. We are living in a rebellious age of the world. I have said, time and time again, that when we live in an age when there are so many rebellious people in the world, when we pick up our newspapers and read rebellion, rebellion, rebellion every day, when we see it on T. V. morning, noon, and night, when we see it demonstrated in all industries, plants, and all walks of life, then a person is very naive if he thinks the time will not come when we will see this even in the church to some degree. It is bound to spill over into the church.

This means that in all probability, the time will come when there will be members of the church who will simply reason like this, "I am a law unto myself. If I don't like a thing, I will disrespect and disobey and create disturbances, riots and trouble." So when a person in the church does that, he is a thousand times worse off than the man of the world. The man of the world doesn't know any better, but a member of the church ought to know better.

So there is a great disrespect for civil authority in the land. Disobedience to civil authority always results in anarchy. When you watch these demonstrators on television and see these people creating riots, have you ever seen one that was very orderly? They are always disorderly. Well, why? Because these people are disobeying the law of the land. When we disobey the law of the land, we have anarchy. That is all that we can have.

I saw a newscast the other day where steel workers were attacking some demonstrators. Most of those are pretty tough men, you know. They were doing a few good jobs out there bringing things under control. Maybe we need men like that on some of these campuses. All of it illustrates and demonstrates that there is a disrespect for law and order which simply means if you don't like the law, then change the law.

Someone might say, "Don't I have a right to disagree with the laws of the land?" Yes, a person has a right to disagree with the laws of the land, but he doesn't have a right to disobey the laws of the land. The only law of the land that you have a right to disobey is a law of the land which conflicts with your religious convictions. This simply means if the law of the land should say you cannot worship God, then you

would have to serve God instead of obeying the law of the land.

At the time Paul lived, there had never been a government more corrupt than the old Roman Empire. Corruption was on every hand. However, the apostle Paul wrote to those Christians and told them to obey the laws of the land even though they were living under a corrupt government.

The very fact that I don't like some of the laws of the land doesn't mean that I have a right to disobey them. Let me give you an example. It is my personal opinion that there are many injustices in the tax structure of our country. There isn't a doubt in my mind, but that the very people who are most able to pay income tax many times never pay this tax. It has been stated that there are many millionaires in this country who never pay income tax at all. They are able to get a group of lawyers who are shrewd men, and they can work and maneuver things in a way that these millionaires do not have to pay any tax. Then many times here is a poor man who has to pay his tax. Maybe there are many injustices in it; maybe the poor man has to do more than his share, but that doesn't mean that, as a citizen, he can refuse to pay his income tax.

So a person may have a right to disagree, but that doesn't mean he has a right to disobey. Many times we think the right to disagree means that we have a right to disobey, and that is wrong and only brings about anarchy in the civil government.

I think there are many reasons why we have seen so much disorder in the country today, such as, destroying property, burning buildings, and stoning policemen.

First of all, I think it is a lack of respect for authority in the home. I think it would be interesting to observe the background of these young boys. Did they come from a home where the parents prayed and the Bible was read? Did they come from a home where the parents took them to Bible study on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night? Did they come from homes where the parents were faithful to God and to the church? Or did they come from homes where there was a lack of authority?

Secondly, I think a lot of anarchy in this country is brought about by a failure to emphasize the responsibility of everyone to obey the laws of the land. That responsibility rests on everybody, not on certain people. There should be no privileged characters in the country. There shouldn't be an individual who says, "I don't have to pay income tax." There shouldn't be an individual who says, "I have the prerogative to run a red light." There shouldn't be an individual who says, "I can do as I please, and no one can disturb me." Evidently there are many people in the country who think they are privileged citizens, that they can do certain things because of who they are and what they are. This brings about a state of anarchy in the land.

WHAT ARE OUR RIGHTS?

Then there is an unparalleled emphasis on the rights of men. That is what we hear everyday, our rights, our rights, we want our rights! Today the rights are being emphasized, but while we are emphasizing the rights of man, we also need to emphasize the obligations of man. Do we mean there are rights without obligations? Do we mean that, as a citizen,

we are entitled to certain rights and yet we are not obligated to be protected yet there is no responsibility on our part? Why don't we talk about our obligations while we are talking about our rights? Certainly we have rights as a citizen of the government, but we also have obligations to the government. We are to obey the laws of the land unless they conflict with the laws of God. So there is much disrespect for civil authority in the country.

In Romans, the thirteenth chapter, when Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he told those Christians to obey the laws of the land, and as Christians today we are to obey the laws of the land. I would think that if an individual thought that he could not live in this country under the laws we have, then the best thing for that person to do would be to go to Cuba, or Russia, or China. There are many, many countries other than America. Stop burning down buildings! Stop destroying property! If you don't like the laws of this land, why don't you go to another country? If you like Russia or Communism, why don't you go to that country? You can get a passport. Many times that would not solve the problem because this individual has a lack of training in his life. He has a lack of respect for authority. By nature, he is just rebellious. He, by nature, wants to create a disturbance. He, by nature, wants to bring on anarchy, and that's wrong. It's sinful, and a nation cannot stand very long with this kind of disorder and anarchy.

Then, there must be respect for authority in the church, that is, respect for spiritual authority. As I stated to you a few moments ago, I can see that when a person reads his newspaper about no one having respect for authority, and he reads this all the

time then he gets the idea, why should I respect anybody? Let everybody be a law unto himself. For this reason we teach and emphasize at Plateau that we should put emphasis in getting our children to attend Bible study and Sunday school. Yet, I am aware of the fact that many times, seemingly, it amounts to very little.

JUDGE SAM DAVIS

I want to read something to you this morning because when we say these things, you know, sometimes it doesn't seem to register. I don't know that this will register, but I can read it to you, then you may think about it. This is taken from a special lecture that was given by the late Judge Sam Davis. I want you to listen to it carefully.

He says, "Since I became Judge of the Juvenile Court of Davidson County on June 1, 1939, I have tried approximately fourteen thousand five hundred youngsters under the age of seventeen for violating the law in my jurisdiction. Of that great host of children, in only two instances did the father and the mother go to Sunday school and church regularly with their children."

Fourteen thousand five hundred cases and only twice did the parents go with their children to Sunday school and church. Then there are young fathers and mothers in this congregation that just can't see the need or the importance of bringing their children to church. Isn't it sad? Well, listen to the rest of it.

"Yet the fathers and mothers that go to church with their children by their way of living impress upon that child that here is something of value." That's what the judge says that the child thinks. He

thinks, "This is important. This is a valuable thing. My parents go all the time."

So listen to the rest of it. "If the parents only go to Sunday school occasionally, then the child is going to soon conclude that Sunday school and church are of little value."

You fathers and mothers who don't bring your children to Sunday school, let me tell you what your children think about it. They think it is absolutely useless and unimportant, and why should they go? But, you will pay for it one day. You will pay a dear price for it.

Daddy can get up on Sunday morning and go down to his office, go out to play golf, or go with his friends on a fishing trip. Then, it isn't going to take little Johnny and little Mary very long to conclude that these activities are far more important than worshipping the Lord. That is the conclusion that the child will draw. Little Johnny, desiring to grow into a big shot like his daddy, will soon begin to sneer and make light of divine things. Isn't that sad? Now, who's responsible? The father; the father who taught him to sneer. The father taught him to make sport of religion. The mother taught him to sneer by not being faithful; showing him what was valuable; teaching the child that fishing was more valuable than worshipping God, and sleeping was more important than going to Sunday school.

There is a possibility that before too long he may be brought in as a delinquent. Don't worry, he'll be brought in. Daddy and mother will then make their way to the juvenile court. How do they act before the judge? What do they say to the judge? Now you listen to it. If this wasn't so serious, I would laugh. They will come in giving explanations and making

alibis for little Johnny, then they will start shedding tears. Isn't that impressive!

They hear preacher after preacher stand in the pulpit and say, "You better take him to Sunday school." They laugh and sneer at that, and they teach little Johnny, "Don't you pay any attention to that preacher. If you want to sleep next Sunday morning, you sleep. We're not going to church today!"

Then they bring little Johnny up, and he gets in court, and the judge says they come down, start crying and wringing their hands and saying that they just cannot understand why little Johnny got into trouble or little Mary has gone wayward. Then he closes by saying, "Really it is not a mystery."

I am wondering how many of you parents who are listening this morning can realize the force of that. How many of you are telling your boys and girls every Lord's day, "Sneer at Sunday school. It's not important. Make light of it. It's not important."

Oh, I don't think you tell them to sneer, but that is the result. I am showing you the results of it. That's what they will eventually do, and who taught them? The father and the mother taught them. Isn't it unfortunate that there are fathers and mothers actually teaching them not to go? Yet, we are living in a world where all these things are happening that I just read to you a few minutes ago.

THE WORK OF ELDERS

So this is the reason that these things are likely to spill over to some degree in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We learn that the church was set up on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After the church was set up God organized the church Himself and put elders over the church. The word elder is the same word as bishop, pastor, or shepherd. Now an elder in the church has no power to legislate. He has no power to make laws. That is not the purpose of elders. We have the law of God, the Bible, that's the law of God. Elders are not set up as legislators in the church to drive God's people, but to lead them. If you notice, the apostle Peter speaks of elders as being shepherds over the flock, which simply means that if a man is a good shepherd, he does what is best for the sheep.

For instance, here is a place where there isn't much water, there isn't much grass, but down here there is plenty of grass, and there is a beautiful stream of water. The good shepherd would lead the sheep where the pasture is green, and there is plenty of water. So, actually, in the church, elders are leaders of the people. They do not drive the people. A shepherd does not drive his sheep, he leads his sheep, and then these sheep follow him. He is a shepherd for them.

I think many times members of the church have a false conception of the eldership. I repeat, they do not make laws. The law has already been given. They see that God's laws are carried out. That is what the elders do. Then they lead the church into these good works. They do not drive but they lead the church into these good works. Elders do what they sincerely and honestly believe is best for the church, not what they think is best for themselves.

The average member of the church, I believe you would agree with me, makes decisions in what is best for himself selfishly. What do I selfishly want?

If we were to say that next week we are going to move this congregation to another place, I suppose you would find it very interesting that the people who live in this community would want it here; the people who live in Chickasaw would want it there; the people who live in Saraland would want it there. Well, why does it work that way? Simply because most of us make decisions, not for what is best for the church, but what do I want personally. I, selfishly, desire this; I want this. Sacrifice the truth; sacrifice the church; give me what I want. Elders are not to make decisions like that. They are to make the decisions that they honestly, sincerely, and prayerfully believe are best for the church. When that decision is made, then there may be someone who has a right to disagree, but he does not have a right to disobey. If he disobeys, he is a rebel. He is a troublemaker and sower of discord. That's exactly what he is. One does not have a right to disobey. One may have a right to disagree but not to disobey. Especially when your decision could be a selfish decision in the first place.

So elders are to lead the church. Elders are to be good elders which means if they are good leaders the church will respect them and have confidence in them. The church believes those men are big men. That's why they were selected. If these men personally desire a thing from a selfish standpoint but they honestly and sincerely believe it would not be best for the church and they say, "I'll give up my selfish desires and do what is best for the church because we are leaders of this group," then these men are good elders. They are qualified elders, all other things being equal. So when elders make these decisions, unless you have been looking at T. V. too much or reading

the newspapers too much about anarchy, you are to respect the decisions that have been made.

It is always an easy thing to criticize. That's the easiest thing in the world to do. You can do that without even reading or writing. It's easy to criticize. I have learned that, in most instances, the most severe criticism will come from one who is selfish. In any work of the church, if I am not careful, I want everything done from a selfish standpoint. What do you want? Do you want what is actually best for the church or, really and truly, do you want something done simply because you, from a selfish viewpoint, would like to see that? What's your reason for it in anything that we may undertake to do in the work of the Lord?

The very fact that men who are made elders of the church would indicate that these men have wisdom and judgment and when they render decisions, then those decisions should be respected if an individual loves the church, if he loves the truth, and if he loves the Lord.

If his attitude is I am a law unto myself, I don't respect anybody's law; I do as I please; I'm a free thinker; and it doesn't make any difference what the elders decide, I don't want it, I'm against it, and I'll let everybody know I'm against it. I can tell you something else you are against, too. You are against the truths of God. You are against progress. So make a list of the things you are against, and I predict we are going to have to teach more and more on respect in matters of spiritual things.

When a person gets to the place in life where he has no respect for the decisions that are made by those who have been selected by the church as their leaders, then this individual is potentially a dangerous man in

the church. You can put that down!

When elders render a decision, a member of the church who loves the Lord does not get on the telephone and begin to gossip, talk, criticize and try to tear down. If you are interested in the church, why don't you do something constructive? These elders make decisions because they are supposed to be some of the wisest men in the church, or they would not have been selected for this position in the first place. I don't mean by that that they are infallible men. No, they are a long way from being infallible men. But, I can tell you one thing, they are good men. They are men who love the church, and they are bigger than selfishness. They want to do what is best for the church instead of doing what is best for themselves. I'm not speaking of any one particular decision. I'm speaking of any decision that the elders make in the work of the Lord.

Elders are to make decisions that would be best for the church. If I, as an elder, cannot do that, then I'm not qualified to be an elder. I should have enough respect for God's church, and the truth of God to simply say, "Men, I'll be perfectly frank with you, I'm just not big enough to make these decisions without being selfish. The decisions I make I'm doing what is best for V. P. Black. I'm doing what I personally want to do. Since I want it this way and I can't do that, I'm going to get out as an elder. I'm just not big enough to put the church first in my life. I'm not that big."

If I'm not that big, I'm just not big enough to be an elder. If I am that big, and these other elders are that big when we make decisions, then if a man loves the church, he is going to respect those decisions. If he

doesn't love the church, he will get around in some cunning, diabolical, deceptive way and make some cutting statement to try and sow discord in the church just as these groups are trying to sow discord in the country. Just as people have no respect for civil authority, there are people who have no respect for spiritual authority.

So we are living in an age when possibly there is a greater need for respect for authority in the home, in civil government, and in the church than any other time in the history of the world.

"And that day there was no king in Israel, and every man became a law unto himself."

Let us all pray that the time may never come when there will be no authority in the home and when there will be no respect for civil authority.

Oh, God, help all of us to pray daily that the time will never come when this rebellious attitude will spill over into the church, and that there will never be those in the church who have no respect for God's leaders over His flock.

Let all of us respect the law and respect authority, then there will be a much better life in the civil government, in the home, and even in the church.

If you are here this morning, subject to the invitation in any way, we bid you come while we stand and while we sing.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

There are many beautiful things in this life, and we like to look upon things that are beautiful. The Christian life is the most beautiful thing known to man. The Christian life is so beautiful that it attracts the attention of all people from all walks of life. Many people have been led to Christ by simply observing the godly conduct of a Christian.

Many, many times while preaching in gospel meetings throughout this nation, someone will say to me, "Brother Black, brother so-and-so led me to Christ. I observed the faithful, dedicated life of this individual. He taught me by his life what a beautiful thing Christianity is."

This, no doubt, is what John meant in I John 3:18, when he said, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

It is not necessary for us to have to tell the people we meet every day that we love God. They can observe by our daily lives whether or not we love God.

Edgar A. Guest wrote the following poem entitled, *Sermons We See*:

*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear:
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their
creeds,
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.*

*I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may
run.*

*And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.*

*When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.
When a weaker brother stumbles and a strong man stays behind
Just to see if he can help him, then the wish grows strong in me
To become as big and thoughtful as I know that friend to be.
And all travelers can witness that the best of guides today
Is not the one who tells them, but the one who shows the way.*

*One good man teaches many, men believe what they behold;
One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.
Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear,
For right living speaks a language which to every one is clear.
Though an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,
I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one, any day.*

I. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A NEW LIFE

A Christian's life is not just another life, it is a new life. John 3:3-5, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

When one becomes a Christian, all things become new. II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

There is a new name. Isaiah 62:2, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy

glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." Isaiah 60:3, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

These are prophecies uttered about 700 years before the birth of Christ. These prophecies not only state God's people would be called by another name, but that it would be a new name.

In the year 60 when James wrote this epistle, they were called by a worthy or honorable name for he says, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called?" (James 2:7).

About the year 96 the Saviour Himself, dictating the epistle to the churches in Asia Minor, used the expression in Revelation 2:3, "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."

Here, a full half century after the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch, we find Christ Himself, the head of the family, commending the churches for still holding fast His name, thus further indicating that they were named after Christ Jesus the founder of the church.

II. THE CHRISTIAN HAS A NEW SPEECH

He does not talk like people of the world. He does not speak unkindly for Christians know how to speak. Some so-called Christians cannot even speak without insulting you. Someone says, "It is just my nature to be abrupt and short-spoken." Yes, and this person has gotten this nature from the devil. If this person were not so closely associated with satan, he would not be so unkind in his speech.

This person needs to imitate Christ and should abide by what Paul said in Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

One, who has never learned how to speak, is like a wolf among innocent sheep. He can tear them to pieces with unkind words.

III. THE CHRISTIAN HAS A NEW ATTITUDE

The old attitude of the world is to love your friends and hate your enemies. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus Christ said, ". . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The parable of the good Samaritan tells us who our neighbor is, and how we are to treat him. Read Luke 10:30-37. The Christian has a good attitude toward his neighbor. Matthew 5:44, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

Most of the trouble that I have observed in the Lord's church the forty years I have been preaching has not come about over doctrinal matters but attitudes. We don't want to admit that our attitude is bad. We try to blame the trouble on doctrine. After all we can always say one is liberal if he does not see things as we see them.

When Jesus was talking to the woman at Jacob's well, he said in John 4:23-24, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

We have heard many sermons on these verses. The preacher will emphasize the importance of worshipping God, the right object. He will stress the importance of worshipping God in truth. All these things are good and true, but we must not stop here. We must not only worship God, the right object, and worship in truth, but we must worship in the right frame of mind. One cannot worship God in an acceptable way while he has an ugly attitude toward his brethren or people in general.

It is just as important to worship God in the right frame of mind as it is to worship God in truth, and the sooner we learn this the stronger we will be spiritually. Jesus said in Matthew 7:12, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: For this is the law and the prophets." It would be impossible for one to obey this commandment without a good attitude.

It is not always easy to manifest a good attitude, but I must in order to be a Christian. I must say that some of the people with the ugliest attitudes, that I have met or dealt with, have been members of the church. Some of them have been preachers who have set themselves up to preach and teach others how to conduct themselves. What a shame!

A new-born Christian enters into a land of beginning again. Louisa Fletcher wrote these words:

*"I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the land of beginning again;
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never be put on again.*

*For what had been hardest, we'd known had been best,
And what had seemed loss would be gain;*

*For there isn't a sting that will not take wings
When we've faced it and laughed it away;
And I think that the laughter is most what we're after
In the land of beginning again."*

IV. THERE IS A GROWTH TO BE MADE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

1. We are to grow in knowledge. Matthew 4:4, "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

I Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Hebrews 5:12, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."

It is sad indeed that so many of our brethren have been fed spiritual baby food with a small spoon so long that when they hear a good strong sermon, it makes them sick. It is absolutely impossible for one to become strong physically without good strong wholesome food. It is also impossible for one to become strong spiritually without good strong teaching.

If an individual eats nothing but sweets and desserts, he will become a sick man and die, if he continues to eat only sweets. If a congregation is fed nothing but spiritual desserts and cookies from the pulpit, the whole congregation will become spiritually sick, and they can no longer discern between truth and error.

In Isaiah 5:20 we read these words, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil: that put

darkness for light, and light for darkness: that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

The saddest thing in all the world is to see a dead preacher, preaching to a dead church the living word of God. We need to grow in spiritual knowledge.

2. A Christian is to grow in good works. Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

The individual who is constantly doing good deeds grew into this habit. The church that is doing good deeds becomes stronger deed by deed, just as we become stronger physically by taking physical exercise.

When we fail to grow, we become spiritual invalids. I remember preaching in a gospel meeting a few years ago, and I saw a girl twenty-seven years old about the size of a four-year old child. She was still sleeping in a baby bed and being fed by her mother. It is sad indeed to see one in such a terrible physical condition.

When a child of God fails to grow, there is something wrong with that person. I know members of the church who are no stronger now than they were ten or twenty years ago. Such people are not an asset to the church, but become a liability.

If I should ask you, do you consider yourself stronger spiritually today than you were one year ago, or five years ago, or ten years ago, how would you answer?

Let us read II Peter 1:12-15, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as

long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance: Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance."

After Peter had told them to add the Christian graces, he tells them that he is putting them in remembrance. Peter, no doubt, had talked to them many times about the Christian graces. They already knew them, but Peter also knew that the power of teaching was in emphasizing the truth. He was saying, "I am going to talk about things so much that after I am dead you will remember the things I taught you."

This is the kind of teaching we need from our pulpits today. Our teaching concerning good works should be so strong that the members cannot forget these lessons. They may forget us, but they will never forget what we teach, if we teach the word of God as it should be taught.

3. We should grow in diplomacy. Christianity is kind and considerate. We need to learn how to talk to people. We need to learn how to act. Some members in the church can be so crude and uncouth.

Some time ago I was having dinner with some people, and I asked about a certain person in the church. The general opinion of those around the table was this: he can't speak to you without insulting you. This possibly was an exaggerated statement of the case, but the person needed a lesson in diplomacy.

There was a man who proved his diplomacy when asked by a widow to give her age. He paused for a while, and she said, "You must have some idea as to how old I am." The man replied, "I have several

ideas. The only trouble is I hesitate whether to make you ten years younger on account of your looks, or ten years older because of your intelligence.”

Some seem to get a joy out of cutting someone down. There may be a certain kind of power in it, but it is not the kind of power that will win people to Christ.

When Jesus commissioned the twelve, He said in Matthew 10:16, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

In Ephesians 4:32, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Colossians 4:6, “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

4. We should grow out of childish ways. Paul said in I Corinthians 13:11, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

In I Corinthians 16:13-14, Paul said, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity.” Notice the strong admonition that Paul gives:

- a. Watch ye, this is, be alert;
- b. Stand fast in the faith, this is, don’t give an inch in doctrinal matters;
- c. Quit you like men, this is, act like a full-grown soldier;
- d. Be strong, this is, in times of battle play a hero’s part.

Notice the metaphor changes whatever the Christian soldier is to be to those who threaten the Christian faith, to those in the church it is love.

Notice the next admonition. Let all things be done with charity. It is characteristic of a child to want everything done his way. If he cannot get his way, he throws a tantrum. Some members of the church are like this. If they can't get their way, they have a little tantrum, and other members give in to them.

Physical adults can be spiritual babies; crying, wait on me; serve me; keep me happy. These are such who have need of milk and not strong meat (Hebrews 5:12-14).

A strong individual can hunt his own food and carry his own weight. A baby must be served, milk must be brought to him. Some babies cannot hold their own bottles. One has to do that for them.

What would you think if you saw a grown man sitting on his mother's lap, twiddling his thumbs, and kicking his feet, while his mother is holding his bottle for him? Ridiculous! Yes, but no more so than a spoiled grown Christian that must be catered to every moment to keep him coming to the service. It is impossible for a church to grow if men like the one described get into the leadership.

V. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE TEACHES ONE HOW TO DIE.

A young girl lay fatally ill. When she was told she could not live, she said to her mother, "You taught me to dance; you taught me how to dress and how to live after the world, but you never taught me how to die."

Christianity not only teaches a person how to live, but it also teaches one how to die. Death to a Christian is his coronation day.

In Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

HARVESTING THROUGH THE ELDERS

When Paul was talking to the elders at Ephesus, he said, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

It is the responsibility and duty of the elders to see that the church is properly fed and looked after in a way that the name of Jesus Christ will be glorified.

We possibly cannot fully realize the awesome responsibility resting upon us as elders in leading, guiding, and feeding the flock of God.

In Hebrews 13:17, we read, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." We learn four things from this verse:

1. Elders are to rule.
2. Members are to submit themselves.
3. The elders watch for the souls of the members.
4. The elders must give an account.

If elders would sit down and think of having to give an account to God for the lives and conduct of the members, I am sure that many elders would become fully aware of the fact that being an elder in the Lord's church consists of more than being in a position to veto things in a business meeting.

Man has always needed leadership. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

Man must have guidance, and it must be the right kind. If not, the people will be led into error. "For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed" (Isaiah 9:16).

Peter tells the elders how to successfully lead the flock. "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Peter 5:1-4).

It is almost impossible for a church to rise above its leadership. The elders are the eyes of the church. The members may see the need of performing many good works, but unless the elders can see the need of it, it will not be done.

The elders are the feet of the church. The members may see the importance of going into mission fields, preaching the gospel, and doing many great deeds, but unless the elders see the need, the church will not go. And, in most instances, the elders do not see the importance of going.

I. WE NEED ELDERS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE LOST.

Our Lord was always very concerned about the

lost. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:36-38).

We will never do much in evangelizing the world until elders become concerned about the lost. Many elders seem to forget that the top priority of the Lord's church is to evangelize the world. Many times very little emphasis is given to the preaching of the gospel when the church budget is being prepared. Our budget shows many times how we major in minors and minor in majors.

Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38).

The parables in Luke the fifteenth chapter concerning the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son were spoken to show the concern the Lord had for the lost, and to impress us with the fact that we, too, should be concerned about those who are lost.

Paul was vitally concerned about the lost. He said, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-3).

Oh, what an apostle's love! What zeal! What

fervor! What concern! That he could bear to be separated from Him for whom he had suffered so much; the One for whom he had been stoned; the One for whom he had been beaten across his back until his shoulder blades looked like white caps in a sea of blood.

When we have in our hearts the concern that Paul had in his heart for the lost, we will preach the gospel in all parts of the world. We have the wealth in the Lord's church to evangelize the world. We have the ministers to evangelize the world, and there are modern communications to evangelize the world, but we lack the concern and the desire to do it.

"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:3-4).

They were not just scattered abroad, but they preached the word of God as they were scattered.

If elders are not careful, they will become so preoccupied with self-interest that they forget what their main purpose is as elders.

Sometimes elders get so involved in the local work that they forget the mission of the church. If the contribution increases in some churches, they use the money to employ an assistant minister. If the contribution continues to increase, then they employ an educational minister. And if the contribution continues to increase, they employ a minister of music, then a youth minister.

Now, there isn't anything wrong with a congregation employing more than one minister to work with them, but when a congregation is so preoccupied with its self-interest that it only spends the money for itself,

we have forgotten what the mission of the Lord's church is. The elders are strictly satisfying self-interest.

We should be vitally concerned about evangelizing the world. And if we employ several ministers to work with one congregation, it should be as a means to an end that we may do more in evangelizing the world.

I personally think that many churches have just about run it into the ground, this business of employing ministers, instead of sending these men into parts of the world to preach to people who have never had an opportunity to hear the gospel.

Why not send one of the men to the mission field? After all this is what the Lord told us to do, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

In Luke the tenth chapter, Jesus tells about a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves. They beat him, stripped him, and left him lying there half-dead in his own blood.

After a while a priest passed by, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. Oh, many sermons have been preached about the priest and the Levite passing by on the other side, and it makes good preaching material.

Sometimes the priest and Levite are pictured as bad men. I have never thought the priest and Levite were bad men in the sense that the world thinks of people being bad. You must remember that they had been up to Jerusalem telling the people how to live and conduct themselves, and possibly how to act in a situation like this one. But when they see the man, they realize he needs help, but after all they had a lot

of obligations at home. They may have been away from home for days or weeks, and there were many things they needed to do at home. And when they looked on the man, their self-interest overshadowed the needs of the wounded man.

The same thing, many times, is true of us. We know that these good works need to be done. We need to realize the world needs to be evangelized. But how many times do we, as elders in the Lord's church, let our self-interest overshadow the many calls that come to us for help? Many times we are like the Pharisees in that we overlook the weightier matters of the law.

Christ said, about the Pharisees, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matthew 23:23).

It is such an easy thing to get hung up on some insignificant thing, and then overlook the great things. Oh, how often we strain at gnats, and then turn around and swallow a camel.

I have seen so many churches divide over just about every kind of hair-splitting, and at the same time, constantly ignore great, plain, positive commandments of our Lord, such as, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." You never hear of a church having a disturbance over this. Why? Because, as a rule, elders just ignore it and go and strangle on gnats. Much of the trouble in the church is concerning some elder who is more concerned about his self-interest than he is the welfare of God's people—the church of Jesus Christ.

II. WE NEED ELDERS WHO HAVE A WORLD-WIDE CONCEPT OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

We will never evangelize the world until we believe that Jesus died for the whole world. Do you really believe that Jesus died for the people in Russia, or in China, or in other parts of the world where the gospel has never been preached? It seems that many believe when Jesus died on Calvary that, in some special way, he died for the people in Texas and those in the deep South.

Listen to me, brethren. When Jesus died on Calvary's cross, he died for every person who had lived or would ever live on the face of the earth. We say this, but do we believe it?

Listen to Paul. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:13-15).

These are some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. If the writer had said that the rich who call upon the Lord shall be saved, that would have excluded the poor. If he had said the poor who call upon the Lord shall be saved, that would have excluded the rich. If he had said the educated, who call upon the Lord shall be saved, that would have excluded the uneducated. If he had said the uneducated, who call upon the Lord shall be saved, that would have excluded the educated. But, thanks be to God, he said "whosoever" and that included V. P. Black.

But notice Paul's reasoning. "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" The answer is simple. They cannot. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" They cannot. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" They cannot.

These verses are not difficult for us to understand. They may be difficult for us to believe. Many times when members say they do not understand a verse, they mean they do not believe it.

Members of the church are just about as uncanny as any other religious people when there is some verse in the Bible they do not want to believe.

For instance, you can't say in the church of Christ, "I don't believe that scripture." If you are sitting in a Bible class, and some man reads a verse in the Bible and you were to speak up and say, "I don't believe a word of that", the church would discipline you. You cannot say that in the church. But I can tell you what you can say for a lifetime and never be bothered. Just simply say, "I don't understand that verse", when you really mean, many times, "I don't believe that verse."

Oh, yes, we know and understand what Paul says here, but how many of us really believe what Paul says?

The mission of the Lord's church is world-wide, and we must visualize the whole world hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Anyone serving as an elder in the Lord's church, who does not have the faith, knowledge, and Biblical understanding to visualize the whole world hearing the gospel, is not fit to be an elder in the Lord's church.

III. WE NEED ELDERS WHO TRAVAIL FOR SOULS.

Isaiah said, "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:7-8).

These words were spoken at a time when the spiritual condition of God's people was at a low ebb. Isaiah is rebuking them with sarcasm. He said a woman gave birth to a son before she travailed, or before her pain came. Then he asked who had seen such a thing? Who had heard such a thing? This was a strong rebuke that God gave to the people through Isaiah. The lack of growth among them was due to their lackadaisical attitude.

When elders begin to lead the church into travelling for souls, we will witness a great growth never observed before in our lifetime.

Isaiah also said, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isaiah 62:6-7).

We need men on the spiritual walls of Zion today, who will not rest, nor give God rest, until the church of our Lord is made a praise throughout all the earth.

The parables that our Lord taught in Luke 11: 5-9 and also Luke 18:1-7 were taught to teach us to persevere in our requests to our heavenly Father.

IV. WE NEED ELDERS WHO REALIZE THE URGENCY OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

Our Lord, while on earth, felt the imperative call of duty. He said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

"Jesus saith unto them, my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

We will not be in this world very long. We are just pilgrims and strangers passing through, and while passing through, our main work is to be about our Father's business. Some of the saddest words in the Bible are found in Jeremiah 8:20, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."

1. The summons to evangelize the world comes from above. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

This summons is not from man but from the Son of God, who is seated on David's throne by the right hand of God, telling us to evangelize the world.

2. The summons to evangelize the world is from beneath. "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24).

Even the man in hell wanted the gospel preached to his brothers. If we could hear those miserable souls in hell praying, we could hear them begging God to send the gospel to those, who have never heard it, that

they might obey it and not come to that awful place of torment.

3. The summons comes from without. When Paul was at Troas, he had an interesting experience. "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9).

People in all parts of the world are begging for the gospel, saying, "Come over into Russia and help us. Come over into China and help us. Come over into Africa and help us."

How can we turn a deaf ear? How can we construct our beautiful buildings; employ our ministers; preach the gospel within our four walls; and turn a deaf ear to the people, who are saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us."

4. The summons comes from within. There was a time in the life of Jeremiah when he was very discouraged.

"Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).

How can we ignore the commands to preach the gospel to the whole world when the call comes from above, from beneath, from without, and from within?

Yes, there is a great responsibility resting upon elders in the Lord's church in evangelizing the world.

THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-24, "And he said, a certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

The parable of the prodigal son has been called a history, a poem, and a prophecy. It has also been called the "pearl of parables." The parable of the prodigal son has been called the greatest parable in the world.

This parable is just as applicable to us today as it was spoken by our Lord almost 2,000 years ago. In this parable we have portrayed human sin and suffering, heavenly pity and forgiveness, man's selfish pride, and God's all-embracing love.

The story of the prodigal son serves two main purposes. In the first part of his career, he is a warning; he is a typical sinner. In the latter part of the parable, he is an example; he is a model penitent.

In the representation of the head-strong, disobedient son, we may recognize some of our own traits and learn to hate the sins that defile us. In the latter state of his departure from home, we see his penitence and humility, a wonderful attitude of heart. The bitter root of sin from which so much evil springs is plainly disclosed here.

This son resented his father's authority and wished to be free to do what he pleased without being rebuked. He wanted to be his own master. There is much to be said in favor of his desire to live his life on his own responsibility.

The time for child training and teaching is a very short period of time. Every father should realize this and do all within his power to train the child while he is under his protection.

The desire of the younger son to leave his father's house and begin life on his own responsibility might have been a perfectly natural and well-intended thing with full consent of his father and with the best of feelings on both sides. It is only when we consider

the spiritual meaning of the parable that we see sins and ungodly conduct of the son. Regardless of what the intentions of the prodigal son were, he was in for some great surprises.

Someone has said that every person in heaven will receive at least three surprises. One, there will be many people in heaven that I thought would never be there. The second surprise will be many that I thought would be there will not be present, and the third and greatest surprise will be that I made it myself.

Let us notice some of the surprises of the prodigal son.

1. That his father gave him his portion of goods. He may have thought that his father would not give him his portion. The demands of the younger son may seem strange to us, but it was a common thing for a father in the East to divide his material possessions with his children while he lived.

Abraham, during his lifetime, bestowed the main body of his possessions on his children. Under the Jewish law a father was not to leave his property as he pleased. The elder son must get two-thirds and the younger son, one-third.

Deuteronomy 21:17, "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his."

Even though the father could divide his property with his children while he lived, yet he did not have to do it. It may have been that the younger son persisted in receiving his part. The father may have tried to reason with him by telling him that this was not wise.

The fact is the father gave him the portion that belonged to him.

We learn from this that if a man persists in doing a thing, God will many times permit it. Study the case of Balaam. Balak sent messengers to Balaam asking him to curse a people who had come up out of Egypt. Balaam answered, "Let me see what God says about it." And God said unto Balaam, "Thou shalt not go with them. Thou shalt not curse the people for they are blessed." Balaam persisted and God permitted him to go (Numbers, Chapters 22-23).

All our requests should be made in the light of God's will. So it may have been a great surprise to the prodigal when he received from his father the things he had requested.

2. He was surprised at how easy it was to leave home. He, no doubt, said to himself, "I want liberty." He wishes to cast off the old restraint. He could have thought his father was too strict. There were many things of the world he had never enjoyed; many things pleasant to the eyes he had never seen. He wants to put forth his hand and partake of some of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. At this point he does not intend to spend his money in riotous living, but he wants the opportunity to spend it as he pleases. He wants to exercise his own freedom of will.

It is such an easy thing for a child of God to drift away from his spiritual home. Many times I have seen a person who is so faithful to attend all the services of the church, visit the sick, help the poor, and constantly doing good deeds, but he begins to miss mid-week Bible study. Very little change is made in his life at this point, at least it seems this

way. Then it is not long until he begins to miss the Sunday evening services; next it is the Bible study on Sunday morning; next it is the worship service. Over a period of months he has drifted away from God. In fact, he, too, has drifted into a far country.

Hebrews 2:1, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at anytime we should let them slip."

Every spiritual delinquent that I know drifted into that state. I have never thought that the younger son was a bad boy when he left home, but that he drifted into that condition. Drifting away is such a terrible sin because, in most instances, we are never conscious of it until it is too late.

The younger son never realized his position until he was in the hog pen feeding the swine. No doubt, he looked back and said, "I never knew it could be so easy to leave home."

3. He was surprised how easy it was to waste his substance. The Bible says, "And when he had spent all." Sin now has control of his life. He did not stop half-way and say, "I may need some of my money." But he went all the way until he spent all. There is no end nor stopping place when once a man decides to live a life of sin. One sin is the decoy or magnet that draws another sin, and sometimes the sin is so deceitful that one is not able to tell when he is walking on slippery places.

Psalm 73:18, "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction."

While he was spending his money on his good-weather friends, he, no doubt, thought he was the most popular person in town. No doubt, he wondered

why people thought so much of him; why everybody wanted to associate with him; why everyone wanted to go out with him. He could not realize his so-called friends were just using him. It seems he never realized that one day his money would be gone. Oh, no doubt, he was picking up all the tabs on all occasions. He could not see that all the people were just using him.

Matthew Arnold said, "On that hard Roman world disgust and secret loathing fell. Deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell."

The cry of the prodigal now is, "I never knew that I could waste my money so quickly." He realizes that it is too late, that he cannot buy friends. There may have been a time in his life when he thought, "When my money is gone, I will still have my friends." But that is not the way sin works.

4. He was surprised that no man would give to him. The Bible says, "And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want." Oh, what a sad scene! A boy who had always had everything he wanted in life, now he is in want. How pitiful! He possibly goes to his so-called friends, but they do not know him now. He possibly tells them how urgently he needs some help, but they don't know him.

An individual told me about a time in his life when he lived like this prodigal son. He told how he was arrested and thrown in jail. And while he was in prison, his so-called friends went to his apartment, took all of his clothes and sold them, and never one time visited him in prison. Oh, if all young people could learn this lesson before it is too late. Friends are never real friends if you have to buy them.

We see this young man who once had plenty,

now in want, penniless, suffering the pains of hunger. At this point no one knows him. He realizes now that what he did was against his own best interests. Selfish, evil living, excessives of various kinds had gained him no real friends and left him in a far country where no one cared if he lived or died.

Byron wrote the following words:

*“My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers and fruit of love are gone
The worm, the anguish and the grief
Are mine alone.”*

5. He was surprised how deep one could sink into sin. He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into the field to feed swine. The American pig or hog is a parlor animal compared to the hog in the Eastern countries during the days of the prodigal son. The purpose of feeding swine was not to fatten them for the market because the Jews did not eat them. They used these hogs to clean up some filthy place. This was the dirtiest and lowest work that one could do. For a young Israelite, noble, delicately nurtured and trained in the worship of the chosen people to be reduced to feeding hogs was a terrible thing. Many Jews would not even say the word “pig or hog or swine”, but they spoke of them as “the other thing.”

The Bible says, “And he would have feigned have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat.” Certainly he was in a terrible plight, when he had to eat that which was meant for the pigs. He never realized that sin could bring him so low.

I was talking to an individual who told me about the time in his life when he had a happy Christian home. but he began to live in sin, finally left his

family, deserted his children, and while he was telling me, tears coursed down his face, and he said, "Brother Black, I would give both my arms if I could only have my home back again."

Sin can truly make one an outcast. If man could only see in the beginning where sin will lead him, then he would flee from sin as he would flee from a poisonous serpent or a roaring lion.

I Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

The laws of God are immutable, eternal, and no man can disregard them without suffering the penalty. Yet the world is full of men who disregard the laws of God. If a policeman were to tell a man to halt, he would heed. Yet when God says to man, "Halt, you are going in the wrong direction," most men would brush God aside, and continue on their sinful course. But the sinner must remember there is a pay-day coming someday.

6. He was surprised that he could repent. Several years ago I was preaching in a revival in Florida, and I talked to an elderly man about obeying the gospel. He wept and said, "I have lived in sin so long, I can't repent." I tried to impress upon his mind that he could if he would surrender to God, but to no avail. The prodigal son came to himself. Sin runs a man crazy. The reason people live in sin is because they are beside themselves.

I want you to observe how he reasoned when he came to himself. If we just had the ability to get sinners to come to themselves, all sinners would repent. So when he came to himself, he said, "How many hired servants in my father's house have bread

enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger."

Notice the beauty of the expression, "When he came to himself." All sin is a form of insanity. A wicked man is not himself. He has lost self-control. Wickedness blinds the intellectual faculties. Sin can so warp a person's mind that he does not know right from wrong.

In Isaiah 5:20, we read these words, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil, that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

Yes, sin can deceive a man into believing that he cannot repent. When the prodigal son made up his mind to repent, he learned it was not an easy thing to go back home. In fact, he wanted to go home. Every sinner wants to come home to God, when he truly repents, when he comes to himself, when he sees what a terrible thing sin is.

7. He was surprised at how eager his father was to receive him. In my mind I can see that father walking across his yard thinking about his son. He looks and sees someone coming down the road. He thinks to himself, "That looks like my son; that walks like my son." But he says, "No, that is not my son, for he was such a fine looking young man, a proud young man, a man of self-respect. That man coming down the road is a tramp. He has no shoes on his feet; his clothes are torn, soiled and filthy."

In a few minutes the father looks again, he says to himself, "That is my son." He recognizes him. The father begins to smile, tears of joy begin running down his cheeks. The old man begins to run with outstretched arms toward his son. He embraces his son, and begins to kiss him.

The son says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring forth the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

The robe stood for honor. "Put a ring on his hand." The ring stood for authority. "Put shoes on his feet." Shoes were a sign of freedom. "Bring hither the fatted calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry. My son was dead, and he is alive again. He was lost and is found."

God wants to forgive every sin and will if the sinner will surrender to God. Our Father is standing, saying to every son, "Come home."

It is a beautiful picture as we see the father embracing the son and forgiving him.

And so, as far as the parable of the younger son is concerned, when it closes, he is in full fellowship with his father.

THE ELDER SON

In Luke 15:25-32, "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and was lost, and is found."

Just about all the preaching we hear concerning the two sons in Luke the fifteenth chapter deals with the younger son, but there are two wayward sons in this parable. When we discuss the younger son and forget about the elder son, we have missed the main force of the lesson. The younger son represents the publican, the penitent person. The elder son represents the Pharisee, the self-righteous person. The ones who Christ condemned most severely while on this earth were the Pharisees.

Read Matthew the twenty-third chapter and notice how severely Christ condemns the Pharisees.

There is nothing more despicable in the eyes of God than a self-righteous fool. This is just exactly what the self-righteous son was in his life and conduct. He complained of his father's partiality in that for his brother he had killed the fatted calf while not even a kid had been slain for him.

The father tells him that he had been enjoying the bounties of his table all these years. He said to his son, "Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. Everything within your reach and view is yours to share."

But this did not satisfy him, because one does not satisfy the self-righteous. Of course the elder brother had an argument. One is a fool who cannot find something about which to argue. The most ungodly people on earth are gifted at finding fault with others. The elder brother was a great fault-finder. Oh yes, he was a homemade martyr. The elder son was much worse than the younger. The elder son had a terrible attitude.

Loving dependence, free obedience, happy service, and a willing mind are the distinctive marks of a true son. The elder son does not have one of these great traits. His father was to him more of a master than he was a father. He disliked the restraints to which he submitted as much as the younger son who would not submit to them. His obedience was not free but compulsory. He was serving for wages and complained that they were not enough. The elder son was as far away from his father's heart and spirit as the younger son had been from his father's home. He had sunk into a bondage from which he was not redeemed as far as the Bible reveals. The elder brother was actually sorry that his brother had come home.

The self-righteous in the Lord's church do not rejoice when the prodigal comes home. They wonder how long he will last. "I would like to know how many times he has walked down the aisle!" Oh, these are sayings of the self-righteous Pharisees. If the self-righteous person could only see himself as God sees him then he would be the first one to walk down the aisle when the invitation is extended. His whole attitude is one of utter lack of sympathy. The elder son refers to his brother not as "my brother" but as "your son." He was the kind of person who would push a man deeper in the mud rather than give to him a helping hand. He had an evil mind. There is no mention of harlots until he mentioned them. He no doubt accused his brother of the sins he himself would like to have committed.

If we are not careful, we will find ourselves accusing people of doing things that we would like to do if we had the opportunity. Notice, in the entire parable the elder son is the only one who talks about harlots. Self-righteousness is as sinful and as evil as unrighteousness and may even be worse.

In Matthew 21:31-32, "Whither of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

Notice what an unlovely character the self-righteous son was:

1. His displeasure at his brother's repentance.
2. His self-righteous pride.

3. His ungracious complaint.
4. His malicious exaggeration of his brother's conduct and his ignoring the change that had taken place in his brother's life.
5. His refusal to acknowledge him as his brother.

The elder son is really the one who is lost. Yes, hopelessly lost. Because the younger son repented.

There were five terrible things wrong with the elder son. As we discuss these things, let us all ask ourselves the question, "Do we see any of these ugly things in our lives?" If we do see any of them, let us pray fervently to our heavenly Father that we will rid ourselves of these terrible sins.

I. WE SEE THE ELDER SON FULL OF ENVY.

Envy is a terrible thing. He could not bear to see his father do a good deed for his brother. Joseph was sold by his brothers because they could not stand to hear Jacob say good things about Joseph. In their hearts they killed Joseph because they thought that by selling him to the Egyptians that within months he would die as a slave.

In Acts 7:9, "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him."

Notice the expression, "but God was with him." God is always with the person who is being envied because of his righteous life.

Titus 3:3, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."

Saul is a classic example of one who destroyed himself with envy. When Saul discovered David and

saw that he was a fine young man, Saul admired him. David had a lot of respect for Saul because he realized that Saul had been appointed to be king over God's people. He carried out the king's order to the best of his ability. David behaved himself wisely and would go or do whatsoever Saul commanded.

When David went against the Philistines and defeated them he returned home. The women came out of the cities of Israel singing and dancing and saying, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David has slain his ten thousands." When Saul heard the first part of this song, his heart was lifted up with pride, for they were singing, "Saul has slain his thousands." But there was a second stanza. The first stanza was no doubt the sweetest music that Saul had ever heard. He gets ready for the second stanza, and the second stanza went like this, "But David has slain his ten thousands." From this day forward Saul begins to envy David.

I Samuel 18:6-9, "And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him: and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward."

Proverbs 14:30, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones."

When Jesus Christ came before Pilate for him to make a decision concerning Christ, Pilate knew in his heart that Jesus was innocent and that the mob was being driven by hate and envy. Matthew 27:18, "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him."

There was a sister in the church saying some ugly things about another sister. When the preacher talked to her about this matter, she finally confessed that she had said these ugly things about her sister because this sister about whom these ugly things were said had been given a shower before she married, and the sister, who had said the ugly things, had not been given a shower.

A preacher was given an automobile by the church. One sister said many ugly things about it. She finally let it be known that she felt this way because her father was a preacher, and the church had never given her father an automobile.

There was a peanut elder (and incidentally there are a lot of this kind) who objected to giving the preacher a raise because the preacher would then be making more than the elder was making.

It is no wonder that Solomon said, "Envy is as the rottenness of the bones."

II. HE WAS ANGRY BECAUSE HIS BROTHER REPENTED.

One would think that he would have rejoiced because his brother had decided to come home. The elder son was in the field. Yes, he was always in the field. It may have been that he was happiest when he was away from his father. The self-righteous spirit is after all an isolated spirit.

The elder son was as forgetful of God as the younger son only the forgetfulness took a different

form. When he comes in from the field and draws near the house, he hears music. He would not go in but called one of the servants and asked, "What does this mean?"

I can hear the servant innocently say, "Your brother has come home, and your father is so happy. He is really thrilled to death that his son has come home. You ought to go in there and join them. They are the happiest people I have ever seen. Your father has laughed more in the last few hours than I have ever seen him laugh. He is so happy that your brother has come home."

The good news made the elder son angry, and he would not go in. I am sure that this self-righteous elder son would have gotten up and walked out on Peter on the day of Pentecost. He could not have rejoiced that Peter repented. It was after he heard the good news about the merrymaking in the house that he flew into a fit of anger and accused his father of favoritism in receiving the penitent son into his fellowship.

Notice the charges he made against his father in this fit of anger. "You never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." So he begins to pout and will not go in. The self-righteous son reminds me of one of these modern-day, self-righteous saints sitting in the house of God, and a brother with another color of skin comes into the building, and this self-righteous saint jumps up and runs out of the building. A person like this has no more Christianity in him than a hog!

He would not go in. Isn't that cute! He thinks he has been a faithful and thoughtful servant, but his heart is black, hard, and unforgiving.

III. HE GOT NO JOY OUT OF SERVING HIS FATHER.

He was a son, but he was serving as a slave. If the elder son had loved his father, he would have gotten a great joy out of serving his father. All indications are that he worked hard, but working hard is not enough. One's heart must be right. The Pharisees were hard workers, but they had such an ugly attitude. They were excellent at manifesting a "holier-than-thou" attitude, but God despised their evil ways.

When we truly love our heavenly Father, we get a great joy out of serving Him. It is not a drudgery to go to mid-week Bible study. It is a joy to the person who loves God.

David said, "I was glad when they said unto me, Come ye and let us go up into the house of the Lord." The greatest joy known to man is the great joy of serving God. Giving of one's means is not something a faithful child of God dreads, but it is in reality a joy.

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

The elder son no doubt looked upon his father as a master and upon himself as a slave. One of the most pitiful sights in the world is to see an unhappy person worshipping with happy people who are serving a loving heavenly Father. Let all of us realize that there is a great joy in serving our heavenly Father.

IV. HE SAID HE HAD NEVER BROKEN HIS FATHER'S COMMANDMENTS.

He was sinning at this very moment for he was breaking his father's heart. He could not have

done anything to hurt his father more than what he did. He refused to go in and welcome his brother home. He let his father know that he was unhappy that his brother had repented. He made unjust charges against his father, yet he made himself believe that he was an ideal son. Oh, how God must despise self-righteousness! The elder son had broken the greatest of all laws – the law of love.

Matthew 22:36-40, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

John 5:42, "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you."

One may go through the outward forms of obeying God without loving Him. This is what the Pharisees were doing. Jesus told them that they did not have the love of God in them. This was the trouble with the elder brother, he served his father but not out of love. There was no joy in serving his father.

V. HE MAGNIFIED HIS BROTHER'S SINS AND MINIMIZED HIS OWN SINS.

The only thing the elder son could think about was the sins his younger brother had committed. He could not call him his brother, "but as soon as this thy son was come which has devoured thy living with harlots." He could not forget how his brother had sinned but was completely blind to his own sins. He does not have one good thing to say about his brother's repenting and coming home.

I think this parable was taught by Jesus to impress upon our minds how good, kind, and willing God is to forgive man of his sins when man repents. It was also taught to impress upon our minds how God despises a self-righteous, holier-than-thou attitude manifested by one of His children.

The parable could have been so different if the elder son had been compassionate and forgiving. Just suppose that after the prodigal son left home and was gone for some time that this elder son observes his father and mother are so concerned and so unhappy. They go to bed late, they arise early. They try to busy themselves with daily activities, but he observes that they are so heartbroken.

One day the elder son calls them into his bedroom and says, "I want to talk to you about my brother and your son. We are all so concerned. I miss my brother so much. We are all so unhappy because he is not here, and mother, I heard you praying the other day as you were working. Then I saw you sit down and cry your heart out. Dad, tonight when I came home I saw the light on in your room, and as I stepped upon the porch I heard you praying. I walked into my brother's room and saw the lamp you lighted the night he left. You have kept it burning in the room ever since he has been gone, I am so concerned about him. I'll tell you what I am going to do. I am going to rise early in the morning, and I am going out looking for my brother."

No doubt the parents would have said, "No, son, you can't do that. We have already lost one son, and we can't afford to see you leave. You are all we have now. We are so proud of you. You are one of the finest boys we have ever known in our lives, so please don't go."

But the elder son says, "Yes, I am going because both of you are so concerned, and I am concerned. He is out there somewhere, and I am going to find him."

And so the elder son leaves home. He is gone for some time, and then one day the father is in the yard. He looks down the road. He sees two men coming toward him in the far distance. He looks and thinks, "Those boys look like my sons."

They draw closer. He realizes that they are his sons. The father runs to meet them. He falls on their necks. He embraces both of them. He says to the younger son, "Son, once you were lost, now you are found. Once you were dead, now you are alive." Then he says to the elder son, "Son, you are the finest boy I have ever known in my life."

And then he says to the servants, "Bring forth two robes; bring forth two rings; kill two calves; let us eat, drink and be merry because my elder son has gone out into the world and found my younger son."

Wouldn't that have been a wonderful way for the story to have ended? And yet, I'm sure that this is the attitude God wants us to have toward all those who are lost. Let us be careful lest we commit the sin of the elder son.

THE LOST SHEEP

Luke 15:3-7, "And he spake this parable unto them, saying, what man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

During this period of our Lord's ministry the publicans and sinners were coming out to hear Him for they observed that He had love for them and compassion upon them. The self-righteous Pharisees knew nothing about love and compassion and even criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. No doubt the Pharisees said, "A man is known by the company he keeps." Therefore, Jesus is a sinner because He is associated with sinners. The great fact that they overlooked was this: Jesus did receive sinners. That which they meant to be a stigma became a blessed thing. He came to seek and save the lost, "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56).

Jesus Christ talked to the sinful woman at Jacob's well. He discussed the subject of worship with her. He was interested in her. Even though her character had been bad, He realized she had a soul, and He was interested in saving that soul.

He went into the house of Zacchaeus and the house of Levi and ate with them. Jesus seems to be defending Himself and also teaching the Pharisees that they had a complete misunderstanding of righteousness. Jesus speaks a parable to them. He tells them about a man who had a little sheep farm with one hundred sheep. He begins to count and can find only ninety-nine sheep. Then Jesus tells how concerned this good shepherd is about this lost sheep. Why is he concerned?

I. THINGS CHARACTERISTIC OF A SHEEP.

1. A sheep is very defenseless. A sheep cannot defend itself against a lion.

If a wolf should spy the sheep out, it could tear the sheep to pieces with its powerful claws. A sheep is not prepared to fight nor is it very alert in fleeing from the enemy. The shepherd is so concerned about the lost sheep because he knows that the sheep is in such great danger. The good shepherd realizes out there somewhere there may be a vicious wolf or roaring lion, and, that if they should find the sheep, they would kill it.

Every child of God who drifts from the fold of God is in great danger. Peter said, "Be sober, be vigilant: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8).

2. A sheep drifts away from the fold. It becomes preoccupied with grazing. As a result, many times, it strays away from the fold. It does not intend to become lost, but it does not have the judgment to look up occasionally and get its bearings. There is

always the great danger that we may drift away from righteousness. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1).

A good shepherd knows that the sheep did not deliberately run off or refuse to associate with the other sheep, but drifted away. Most of God's children, who are unfaithful, did not decide one day to renounce Christ but slowly drifted away from Him. I guess there is a tendency in most of us to drift away from the straight and narrow way, therefore the warning is given to us by Almighty God, "Take heed, lest ye drift."

3. A sheep has very little sense of direction. Dogs have been known to travel thousands of miles over hills, mountains, deserts, and rough terrain and after many months have been able to find their way home. Cats have been taken away from home and left, but within a few days they would find their way back home. However, this is not true of a sheep, and the good shepherd knows it. He knows the sheep may be weary and worn where there is neither green grass nor water, far away from the flock and the pasture. The shepherd realizes that the sheep will soon perish. Therefore he is very concerned about the lost sheep and knows the sheep is in great danger.

Man in so many ways is like a sheep. Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

Oh, how often we, as children of God, need help, direction and guidance that we ourselves may stay in the straight and narrow way.

4. A sheep has little sense of discernment. A camel can sense water from a long distance. An eagle seems to know just where the carcass is and when to get there. A bear knows the day and even the very hour to go into hibernation. But a poor sheep seems to have none of these qualities.

Man is, so many times, like the sheep when he cannot discern between good and evil. When a person begins to live in sin, it becomes impossible for this person to discern between right and wrong, good and evil. One can drift into such a condition in life that he even calls that which is darkness, light, and he calls that which is light, darkness. He calls good, evil, and evil, good. Sin causes one to lose all sense of discernment.

II. WHY WAS THE SHEPHERD SO CONCERNED?

1. He owned the sheep. This parable is not talking of a hired shepherd. "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them." Jesus in another place speaks of the hireling who would flee when the wolf comes. A real shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep. These sheep belonged to him, and he was concerned about them. We belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:18, 19). Paul said, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought

with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19, 20).

We must always keep in mind that Christ loves us, and we owe everything to Him. Oh, how we should love and obey Him because we belong to Him.

2. Because of the great compassion for his sheep. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

We need more compassion in the Lord's church for those who have drifted from the fold. Have you ever observed when a child is lost from its home, everyone in the family goes and searches for the child? They even call the neighbors and all join hands and search until the child is found. I'm sure there are many sheep that have drifted from the fold, and no one has gone out looking for them. We all should be more concerned about those who have gone astray. No doubt, many of God's children are wandering on the mountainside of sin because no one has shown any interest in them, or concern for them, or gone out of the way to try to bring them back. We should put forth every effort to get those back in the fold who have drifted away.

3. He was the shepherd of the sheep. A good shepherd is going to do everything possible to safeguard his sheep. A good shepherd will care for the weak and sick ones. If one has been hurt, a good shepherd will dress the wounds and care for the sheep until it is well. There are many sheep in the Lord's fold who are sick and need attention. So many times instead of caring for them, we let them go unattended.

A sheep may wander from the fold and forget

about his shepherd, but a good shepherd does not forget about the lost sheep. Many wandering sheep have been brought back into the fold because some good shepherd, who was vitally concerned about the straying sheep, went out and searched and searched until he found the sheep.

III. THE KINDS OF SEARCH FOR THE LOST SHEEP.

1. A definite search. A good shepherd goes after the lost sheep and nothing else. He has that one particular sheep in mind.

A good shepherd in the Lord's church today will concentrate on one lost sheep at a time. He goes not after the multitude at once but one sheep at a time. It seems that many shepherds in the Lord's church just draw a bow at random and shoot. But this is not true of a good shepherd. He concentrates on that one lost sheep, and when he brings the sheep back into the fold, he then concentrates on another lost sheep. If there is one that is lost, then the search is definite until he finds it.

2. It is an all-absorbing search. The shepherd is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety and nine are left in safety. He does not leave them in some barren place, but he leaves them in a well-provided place. The one uppermost in his mind is that lost sheep. He realizes the way may be rocky. It may be a hard climb up the steep mountainside, but the shepherd does not notice the roughness of the way. This fact is overshadowed by his desire to find the lost sheep. The shepherd is willing to leap into danger. His fear is overshadowed by his strong love for the lost

sheep. It is wonderful to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with His loving heart set upon receiving those who are lost.

3. It is a persevering search. Notice the expression, "Until he finds it." We often ask the question, "How long are we to search for a lost soul?"

We must notice that no hint of failure is given in the parable. We are so easily discouraged in our search for the lost. We must remember the value of a soul while we are searching.

Christ asked, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

There is great joy when the lost is found. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

If all of God's faithful children would go out and search diligently for those who have strayed from the flock, there would be a great spiritual awakening in the Lord's church. There would be a joy and happiness among God's people that we have never witnessed before.

IV. WHEN THE SEEKING IS ENDED.

1. He has found it. When the shepherd finds the sheep, he lays it upon his shoulder and rejoices. Someone has said the following in speaking of the mission of Christ:

- a. In His incarnation He came after the lost sheep.
- b. In His life He continued to seek it.
- c. In His death He laid it upon His shoulders.
- d. In His resurrection He bore it on its way.
- e. In His ascension He brought it home rejoicing.

When he finds the sheep he lifts it up out of the mud or briars into a place of safety. He takes a strong hold upon the sheep, lays it upon his shoulder, and seems to say, "I am a long way from home in a rocky, barren place, but I must get my sheep back to the fold."

Surely we remember when the Lord lifted us out of sin. What a day of rejoicing that was when we were delivered from the wilderness of sin!

2. He was doing a kind deed for the sheep. The shepherd is carrying the sheep. Jesus will still carry us if we will permit Him to do so.

Isaiah said, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

V. THERE IS JOY WHEN THE SHEEP IS FOUND.

"When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing." Oh, how happy the shepherd was when he found the lost sheep!

When a child is lost in the forest for several days, and then is found; oh, what joy is in the hearts of the father and mother!

We cannot conceive of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Heaven overflows with joy over every lost sheep that is found.

The text tells us that there was more joy over that lost sheep than over the ninety-nine. Let me give you an illustration. There are several boys in a family. One of these boys leaves home. The other boys remain with the family. This one who left home lives in sin for a while. He sees his mistakes and comes home. On the day he arrives home there is great joy over his return.

This does not indicate that the boys who stayed at home are not appreciated. Their love is appreciated because they never went astray. But the entire family, father, mother and brothers, are so happy that this one has returned home.

Again, there are several boys in a family and one is taken seriously ill. He is brought near the gates of death. All the other boys are well and in good health.

The father and mother sit by the bedside of this ill son for days, wondering if he will live. Then finally the day comes when the fever subsides, and the child's health is restored. Oh, what joy is brought to the entire household! Even though the father and mother are expressing great joy over this one who has been restored to his good health, this does not mean that they do not love or appreciate those who were in good

health all the time.

The Great Shepherd is inviting every sinner to come to Him. He will forgive you of every sin if you will believe on Him (Hebrews 11:6), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3), confess His name (Matthew 10:32), and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38), and then live the Christian life.

If you are not a child of God, the greatest thing you could do would be to render obedience to the gospel.

If you have drifted away from the fold of God, the wisest, smartest, greatest thing you could ever do in your life is, through repentance and prayer, come home and be restored to your first love.

I AM DOING A GREAT WORK, I CANNOT COME DOWN

Nehemiah 6:3, "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

While Nehemiah was a servant in Shushan the palace, he saw some of his brethren from Judah. He asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped which were left of the captivity and concerning Jerusalem.

They reported to him that the remnant left of the captivity was in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem had been broken down, and the gates had been burned with fire.

This sad report broke Nehemiah's heart, and his countenance was sad. Nehemiah did three things which showed great concern on his part.

1. He sat down and wept. We learn in studying the Bible that great men often wept over the sinful condition of the world.

Jeremiah 9:1, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

John 11:35, "Jesus wept." No doubt, Jesus was weeping when he said in Matthew 23:37-38, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

Acts 20:28-31, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

2. He fasted. The very fact that he fasted on this occasion shows his great concern for God's people. If members of the Lord's church should fast today because of poor attendance, small contributions, and the lack of interest in mission work, we, no doubt, would witness a great growth of the Lord's church. Oh, if we only had more men in the church who are as concerned about the welfare of God's people as was Nehemiah who was so concerned that he fasted.

3. He prayed. Nehemiah realized that God heard the prayers of his faithful children. Nehemiah prayed that the ears of God would be attentive and His eyes open that He would hear the prayers of His servant. He begins his prayer by confessing the sins of the children of Israel. He confesses that Israel had dealt corruptly against God, and that they had not kept the commandments of God. He pleads for Jehovah to be attentive to his prayer and heed him.

Nehemiah was so concerned about his people that Artaxerxes, the king, noticed that Nehemiah

was depressed. The king asked Nehemiah why his countenance was sad. Nehemiah told the king that the city, the place of his father's sepulchre lieth waste and the gates thereof are consumed with fire.

The king asked, "What do you want?"

Nehemiah, after telling the king the terrible plight of the Jews and of the shame and reproach that had been brought upon them by the enemies, said to the king, "Send me unto Judah unto the city of my father's sepulchre that I may build it."

The king gave Nehemiah permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem. This shows the great respect and the great confidence the king had in Nehemiah.

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant heard it, it grieved them exceedingly that there would come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. It seems that there is always a Sanballat and Tobiah in every church to oppose every good work. So many good works in the Lord's church are never accomplished because some Sanballat in the church opposes it.

Paul speaks of this kind when he says in Titus 1:16, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

Nehemiah arose in the night and rode his beast by the gate of the valley, viewed the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and the gates that had been burned. The rulers knew not that he went by night to see the plight of the city. He called the people together and said, "Let us build up the wall of Jerusalem that we be no more a reproach."

When Nehemiah and his brethren went to work on the wall, the enemies began to put forth efforts to destroy the good work.

There were four ways the enemies tried to stop this great work. I am sure these four methods are still being used in congregations of God's people where there is the attempt to accomplish great things for God.

1. THEY RIDICULED NEHEMIAH.

In Nehemiah 4:1-3, "But it came to pass, when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."

This was sarcasm and ridicule that they were poking at God's people. Sanballat and his friends had at first thought it impossible that Nehemiah would attempt to rebuild and restore the wall of Jerusalem. This must have been a great shock to them that this man of God would come to Jerusalem and attempt to do such a great work in the presence of his enemies. It was truly a great task. They saw that the work was begun, and that they were making progress. Sanballat and his cohorts began to vent their hatred, scoff and ridicule. They, no doubt, thought the circumstances justified their contention.

1. They thought it was an impossibility for Nehemiah to rebuild the wall.
2. They referred to the Jews as "those feeble

Jews," feeble in number, wealth, and mental capacity (Nehemiah 1:27);

3. Concerning the expectation of divine aid, they said, "Will they sacrifice?"

The enemy failed to take into account what God's faithful children can do. One of the most amazing things I have observed in my preaching life is what people can do when they have strong faith in God.

Ridicule is a powerful weapon of the devil, but many great men who could fight battles have fallen before ridicule. I try hard never to let a person's ridicule affect me, for to do so is to regard him too highly. We must realize that ridicule comes to us from people who are much inferior to us in Christian living.

Christians should pray for those who ridicule. Christ said, "Pray for them that despitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44). Being reviled, we bless. We must pray for ourselves that we may have the strength to bear contempt in a Christ-like way.

In the face of ridicule they continued to rebuild the wall. Sanballat said, "What do these feeble Jews?" Tobiah said, "If a fox should run up the wall, it would fall." Ridicule is a favorite weapon of those who oppose good works.

The world ridiculed Noah when he built the ark. But their ridicule turned into praying, when it began to rain. Paul was ridiculed. All great men of the world were ridiculed. Peter was ridiculed. All the apostles were ridiculed. The early Christians who attempted to do great things for God were ridiculed. And all great men of the Restoration Movement have been ridiculed. All the great men in the Lord's church today have been ridiculed.

We must realize that any simpleton can ridicule,

and the weakest minds seem to be gifted at it. Those who ridicule good works should remember that it is the weapon of the fool they are wielding. The weapon of ridicule is a blade that cuts deeply. Sanballat and Tobiah knew this to be true. Sometimes ridicule is the worst suffering we are called upon to endure in serving God.

This ridicule, no doubt, hurt Nehemiah to some degree, so he began to pray to God, "Hear, O our God."

At all times we should carry our troubles to the Lord. Hebrews 4:15, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

When the enemies were attacking them, Nehemiah and his men let their ridicule become an inspiration for them to work harder. Notice the expression, "So built we the walls." Instead of the ridicule hindering them and stopping them, Nehemiah just simply said, "You have motivated us to work harder." Oh, what a dedicated man Nehemiah was!

And we need more men in the Lord's church today like Nehemiah. The more the enemy ridiculed, the more they were stimulated to work. They not only worked but there seemed to be perfect cooperation among them. Notice the expression, "The people had a mind to work." God's people can never do a great work unless the people have a mind to work. And when all of God's people have a mind to work, Satan and all of his angels cannot destroy the works of God.

When Sanballat and Tobiah heard the walls were rebuilt, they were wroth. This means they got mad!

They had tried every way in their power to stop the work, but thus far they were unable to do so. In all the opposition of the enemies Nehemiah prayed to God. He not only prayed, he and the other Jews went to work. It is good for us to pray, but we must remember that we must also work.

Notice how Nehemiah and his brethren worked. In Nehemiah 4:15-23, "And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off

for washing.”

This gives us an idea how these people worked, and how they were able to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Any congregation that has this kind of cooperation and a desire to work could accomplish great things for the Lord anywhere and anytime on the face of the earth.

II. THEY TRIED TO TRICK NEHEMIAH INTO STOPPING THE WORK.

They said to Nehemiah, “Come down and let us talk,” pretending that they wanted to talk to Nehemiah, when in reality they only wanted to get him in their power. Nehemiah was too wise to be caught. He knew it was a trap set by his enemies. The enemies knew of the great work that was being done and wanted it stopped. They knew how well protected Nehemiah was, and also knew they could not take him on the spot. They were too wise to meet Nehemiah in the city because people might suspect something.

They said, “Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plains of Ono.” The Bible also says, “But they thought to do them mischief.” They may have planned to imprison him or to murder him. We know their hearts and desires were not sincere. But Nehemiah was smart enough that he refused to believe that they were sincere in calling a conference.

In my life as a preacher, I have observed that if you don't do anything, you don't subject yourself to criticism. If you work and promote good works, there are those who will always attack. They are reprobates to every good work.

The average congregation of God's people could

do great things if it were not for the Sanballats and Tobiahs in the church. Oh, the many times elders have given up some good work because some member of the church, who was in agreement with Satan, opposed the work. We need more elders and preachers in the Lord's church who will not fall for the tricks of the devil.

Nehemiah sent messengers to tell them that he was doing a great work and could not come down to Ono. If a person is busy in the kingdom of God, he does not have time to fuss and argue with people. Someone has said, "A kicking mule cannot pull, and a pulling mule cannot kick." These members, who are constantly finding fault, are not worth a thing to the cause of Christ. The church would be stronger spiritually without them. And every member of the church should ask himself honestly and sincerely the question, "Am I an asset or a liability to the Lord's work in this particular place?"

During the forty years I have worked with the church in Mobile, Alabama, I cannot recall ever undertaking a great program of work but what some Sanballat or Tobiah in the church opposed it. I learned from Nehemiah to tell them, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down."

If I had spent my time arguing with the devil and his cohorts, I would not have accomplished anything in life. The devil has always opposed every good work I ever promoted. After all, that is the business of the devil. That is his work; that is his aim; that is his purpose.

In I Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Job 1:6, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them."

Everytime God's people propose some good work, the devil is among them having transformed himself into an angel of light. I suppose I have preached many times when the devil was on the front pew. We must constantly realize that the devil is opposed to God's people and will use any means to obstruct the work. Sanballat and Tobiah are two classic examples of it.

The devil is persistent. When they sent Nehemiah the invitation to come to Ono to talk with them, Nehemiah refused, but this did not stop the enemy. Four times they sent for Nehemiah to come to Ono. Four times Nehemiah sent them the same message, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down."

III. THEY FALSELY ACCUSED NEHEMIAH.

They said Nehemiah was going to make himself king. This statement was made to prejudice the minds of the people against Nehemiah. It has been said, "It is common for that which is known only to the malicious to be falsely represented as being known to the many."

It is possible that Sanballat at this point pretends to be a friend, hoping that the information would encourage Nehemiah to meet him. These words of the enemy are smoother than oil, and yet was in his heart, and he hoped, like Judas Iscariot, to give a kiss unto death. Nehemiah knew it was an effort to weaken his hands.

Sanballat knew the power of a false report. People are prone to believe lies. Man is apt to believe

those things which are bad about his fellowman. We have no right to spread an injurious report merely because somebody brought it to us. It is a crime to pass bad money, just as it is a crime to make bad money.

We are bound to consider whether the person from whom we heard the report had opportunities of knowing the truth in the matter. Does this individual ordinarily form a sound judgment of the facts which come under his knowledge? Would we have believed him if he had said the same thing to us about one of our friends? These are things we need to take into consideration when we hear some kind of gossip. There would be less gossip manufactured if people were hesitant to circulate it.

Jeremiah 20:10, "For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it . . ." No doubt, Sanballat knew that many had been destroyed by false reports. The false report did not discourage Nehemiah. He knew the report was untrue and kept on working. But it takes a strong man to stand in the face of opposition, criticism and false reports.

IV. THEY TRIED TO SCARE NEHEMIAH.

This great man of God would not be scared. Tobiah and Sanballat hired someone to lie for them. The enemies of Nehemiah would leave no stone unturned to discourage him. In order to do this, they tried to get him to come to the country to meet them. Nehemiah refused.

They tried to get Nehemiah to go to the temple for his safety. He refused. All these things they designed were to bring Nehemiah to do a foolish thing that they might laugh him to scorn. "That I should

be afraid, and so they might have some matter against me for an evil report and might reproach me.”

When they were trying to scare Nehemiah, he said, “Should such a man as I flee? Why should I be afraid? I am doing a great work. My God is with me and my God will deliver me and help me.”

Nehemiah 6:16, “And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.”

There is a great lesson in all this for us. When we undertake a great work for God, there will be opposition to it by the enemies. If we remain faithful to God, keep our faith and determination, God will bless us.

SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

“For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In order to ascertain the truth, four things must be kept in mind.

1. One must love the truth. God never intended for a dishonest person to understand the gospel.

“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

2. The Bible is God’s complete, final authoritative revelation to man.

It is an easy thing for man to flatter and deceive himself into believing that he will be judged by the light he has instead of the solemn law of God.

3. The Bible is to be studied intelligently. “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

If one does not consult the Bible and properly divide the truth, he will likely believe that he has license to believe what he pleases.

4. No single verse tells everything about any Bible subject. If one wants to know the truth on any subject, he should study all the Bible says on that particular subject.

There are two words that sum up salvation. These two words are grace and faith. Grace includes what God has done to make salvation possible. Faith includes what man does to receive God's grace.

Grace is a broad and inclusive term. Grace means favor, kindness, mercy, unmerited favor. All that we have in this life is an expression of God's grace. All material blessings: the rain, the sunshine, seasons of the year, shelter and food, all of these things are manifestations of the grace of God.

All spiritual blessings are these: God planning man's salvation after the fall; coming of Jesus; shedding of His blood; all these things are manifestations of God's grace.

Faith, also, is a broad and inclusive word. There are two kinds of faith, a living faith, and a dead faith.

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26).

The faith that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:8 is an active faith that leads one to obey God.

Let us give some examples of men who had faith in God.

1. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (Hebrews 11:7).

In Genesis the sixth chapter we read about the instructions that God gave to Noah. The Bible says, "Thus did Noah: according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Genesis 6:22).

2. "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac" (Hebrews 11:17).

When we turn to Genesis 22, we learn that Abraham took his son, traveled three days to Mt. Moriah, built an altar, laid the wood in order, bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. Abraham stretched forth his hand to slay his son, but an angel of God said, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad."

We see that Noah's faith and Abraham's faith led them to obey God. A faith that does not lead man to obey God is a dead faith and cannot save.

An active faith is more than a mental accent to truth. An active faith is more than just some emotional feeling. An active faith takes God at His word and obeys Him.

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42).

Since we have seen that grace and faith are broad and inclusive words, let us put them together and see what we learn. We can learn the meaning of Ephesians 2:8 by observing what the brethren in Ephesus did to become children of God.

Let us keep in mind that Paul was talking to the brethren at Ephesus when he said, "For by grace are ye saved through faith." The new King James version says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith."

Let us go to the Bible and see what they did to be saved by grace through faith. If we can learn what

they did to be saved by grace through faith, then we will know what we must do to be saved by grace through faith.

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth” (Ephesians 1:13). We are told here the Ephesians heard the word of truth. But Paul said that they were saved by grace through faith. We must conclude then that to be saved by grace through faith, one must hear the truth.

We also read in Ephesians 1:13 these words, “In whom also after that ye believed.” Let us keep in mind that Paul said they were saved by grace through faith. But Paul said the Ephesians believed. We must conclude that for one to be saved by grace through faith, he must believe.

Let us learn some more facts about the Ephesians. “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God” (Acts 20:21). Paul was talking about the Ephesians when he spoke these words. Let us keep in mind that Paul said the Ephesians were saved by grace through faith. We must intelligently conclude that for a man to be saved by grace through faith, he must repent.

Let us now turn to Acts 19:18. Paul is still talking about the Ephesians. “And many that believed came, and confessed.” We must conclude that to be saved by grace through faith, one is to make the confession.

Now, let us turn to Acts 19:5 which says, “When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” Keep in mind Paul said that the Ephesians were saved by grace through faith. We must conclude that for one to be saved by grace through faith, he must be baptized.

I know that I understand Ephesians 2:8 because Paul tells us what it means. How can anyone claim to be saved by grace through faith without doing what the Ephesians did to be saved by grace through faith?

We also learn as we study this subject that what is ascribed to grace is many times ascribed to the gospel.

1. In Ephesians 2:5 Paul says we are saved by grace. In I Corinthians 15:2 Paul says we are saved by the gospel.

2. Romans 5:2 Paul says we stand in grace. I Corinthians 15:1 Paul says we stand in the gospel.

3. Acts 20:32 refers to the word of grace. Acts 15:7 refers to the word of the gospel.

4. Titus 2:11 Grace has appeared unto all men. Colossians 1:23 Gospel has been preached to all men.

5. Galatians 1:6 Paul uses grace and gospel synonymously. Hear him, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel." Notice the contrast between the grace of Christ and another gospel. The grace of Christ and the gospel of Christ in this passage are synonymous. "God's grace has appeared unto all men, teaching them." How? Through the gospel of Christ.

While we emphasize obedience, we must not forget that man is not saved by his own righteousness. "Not of works, lest any man should boast." There is

no work man can do to merit salvation. Man does not earn his way to heaven. If he did, it would not be God's grace. Isaiah said, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

The Bible makes a distinction between man's righteousness and the righteousness of God. Paul, speaking of his Jewish brethren, said, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3).

But to do what God commands us to do is not depending upon our own righteousness. In John 6:29 Jesus said for a man to believe is a work of God. In Psalm 119:172 we are told that all of God's commandments are righteousness. Let us not confuse man's works of self-righteousness with God's commandments.

If a building were on fire, and a man climbs out of the burning building onto the ledge of the building five stories high, he cannot save himself, so a man extends to him a ladder. The man gets on the ladder and climbs down. The man was saved by grace, but he had to climb down the ladder to safety. God has extended the ladder of salvation to man, but he must get on the ladder and climb upward.

What does the grace of God do for us?

1. The grace of God has brought salvation to us. If it were not for the grace of God, there would be no salvation. We do not receive salvation because we deserve it, but by the grace of God we obtain it. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." (Titus 2:11).

2. The grace of God teaches us. It is because

of the grace of God that we have been taught the truth about faith, repentance, confession and baptism. The grace of God teaches us that we should deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and that we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). We did not nor have we done anything to merit these great blessings, but because of the unmerited favor of God, we have received this teaching.

3. The grace of God covers our sins. "Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20).

R. L. Whiteside says the following about Romans 5:20, "Law was given to restrain people from wrong and guide them in the right way. There is this, however: the more things law prohibits and the more things it requires, the more points there are where we may violate law. In that way law may increase the number of sins. A man might observe the moral law out of regard for himself and his fellow man, without any regard for God; but a positive law determines his attitude toward God. If a man has rebellion in his heart, positive law reveals it. Adam violated a positive law not a moral law. Sin abounded in that it triumphed over the sinner, made him feel his helplessness, and offered him no hope of deliverance. When there was law, sin abounded. On the other hand, where sin abounded, much more did grace abound."

When Paul said that grace did much more abound, many misunderstood him and said Paul was teaching that if you want the grace of God manifested, then commit sin. The more sin one commits the more

the grace of God will be manifested. Paul would say this is not true.

Listen to Paul in Romans 6:1-4, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

When one obeys the gospel and tries hard to live right, he will still make mistakes and at times sin, but the grace of God will cover his sins if he is walking in the light (I John 1:7).

4. The grace of God gives us what we need not what we deserve. Many times when a person makes a mistake and is punished, someone will say he deserved it. Well, my friend, if you get what you deserve, you are going to be lost.

Let us look at some Bible examples of God giving people what they needed, and not what they deserved.

In II Chronicles 17 and 18 we read about Jehoshaphat who was a good man. He was king over Judah. He built fenced cities and set up garrisons in the land. He walked in the first ways of David and sought not unto Baalam. Jehoshaphat's heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord. He sent out the princes, Levites and priests to teach the people. All these admirable traits tell us he was a good man. But we are told that he joined affinity with Ahab. He made a bad mistake by going to war with Ahab against the Syrians.

"And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him" (II Chronicles 18:31).

Jehoshaphat deserved to die because he joined hands with an enemy of God to go to war. But God extended grace to him, and his life was spared.

In Leviticus 20:10 we are told: "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adultriss shall surely be put to death."

David committed adultery with Bathsheba. He broke the law and deserved to die. But David repented, and then God gave David what he needed and not what he deserved. This was the grace of God.

On one occasion when Christ was teaching in the temple, the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery. They said to Jesus that the law of Moses commanded that such should be stoned. This was true. The law of Moses stated that one taken in adultery should be stoned. But Jesus did not give the poor woman what she deserved. He gave her what she needed and that was the grace of God (John 8).

Jesus taught a powerful lesson in the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus tells how this young man sent to his father and asked for the portion of goods which he would receive at his father's death. He went into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. After he spent his money, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. He got a job feeding hogs. This brought

him to his senses. He began to think how well he had it at home. So he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19).

He was right. He had conducted himself in such a way that he did not deserve to be called his father's son. But the father gave him what he needed and not what he deserved.

Notice what the father said, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry" (Luke 15:22-23).

The father was giving to the son what he needed and that was grace.

Ezra expressed it well when he said, "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this" (Ezra 9:13).

5. The grace of God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. If we could work and merit salvation then God would owe it to us as a debt, and it would not be grace.

Three little boys went into a florist shop and asked the proprietor if he had any yellow roses for thirty-six cents a dozen. The proprietor asked, "Why do you ask if I have any roses for thirty-six cents a dozen?"

The boys told him that they were playing ball, and the ball went into the street, and their buddy ran

into the street to get the ball and was hit by a car and killed. They said, "We have put our money together and we have thirty-six cents."

The proprietor said, "Let me check again. Oh, yes, we have received some yellow roses, and they are thirty-six cents a dozen."

The man was doing for the little boys what they could not do for themselves.

God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

It is possible for one to receive the grace of God in vain. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain: but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:10).

It is possible for one to receive the grace of God in vain by receiving it, and then conducting himself in such a way as to forfeit it.

*"In looking through my tears one day
I saw Mt. Calvary,
Beneath the cross there flowed the
Stream of grace as fathomless as the sea.
Grace for time and eternity,
Grace enough for me."*

WHEN THE BOOKS ARE OPENED

There is no truth more clearly taught in God's word, no fact more firmly established, and no warning more emphatic than the teaching that the books will be opened on the day of judgment. The Bible clearly teaches that at the second coming of Christ, there will be the resurrection of the dead and then the judgment. This is the event when all intelligent and accountable people shall be brought into His divine presence, and the books will be opened. "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). These words were spoken by Paul to one of the most learned groups of people in Paul's day. The audience was composed of the leading philosophers of that day, assembled in the great Areopagus in Athens.

It is interesting to observe how often books and the judgment are referred to in the Bible. "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sins; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exodus 32:32). "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened:

and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:12-15). "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).

The day the books will be opened will be a great day for some, but for most of the people it will be a sad day. Several years ago I was on my way to a meeting in Waukegan, Illinois. It was necessary for me to change trains in Chicago. I stepped off the train, and as I was walking toward the station, I observed hundreds of people greeting one another. They seemed so happy to be reunited. There was happiness, joy and laughter being manifested by all in this group. But as I continued to walk toward the station, there was a small group, possibly a dozen, who had sorrow written on their faces. When I got close to these people, I heard a mother hysterically cry out, "That's my son they are taking off the train." I looked and they were taking a casket off the train and putting it into the hearse. I thought as I walked toward the station, the judgment will be like this: some will be happy and some very sad. When the books are opened, God will interpose directly into human history and bring this old world to a final close.

The Judge sitting on His throne will pronounce the eternal destiny of every man.

WHO WILL OPEN THE BOOKS?

I am so glad that some man will not open those books and be my judge. I am so thankful to God that I am not going to stand before a group of preachers on that day. I also rejoice that I am not going to stand before a group of elders on that day. These people might be prejudice or err in their judgment.

The story is told of a man living in Alaska many years ago who made his living hunting and trapping. He always left one dog at home to guard his wife and child. One day he was coming home from a hunting trip, and his dog he had left to guard his wife and child came down the trail to meet him. He saw blood dripping from the mouth of the dog. He thought the dog had killed his child and in a fit of anger killed the dog. He ran into the house, and the child was safe in its mother's arms. She told him the child was playing in the yard, and when this wolf came near, the dog fought fearlessly and killed the wolf. The man cried out, "I killed that dog." He was so conscience-stricken that he buried the dog and today there is a tombstone erected over the body of that dog. Why? The man erred in his judgment.

It will not be like this on the day of judgment because the Son of God will be the one to open the books and do the judging. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). The one who will open these books will be the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who was born in a stable because there was no room for him in the inn; that same Jesus the heavenly chorus sang

about the night he was born; that same Jesus who confounded the learned people in the temple at the age of twelve; that same Jesus who was baptized by John in the river Jordan; that same Jesus who stood on Mt. Olive and wept over Jerusalem; that same Jesus who for three and one-half years stood with outstretched arms saying to sinners, "Come unto me and I will give you rest;" that same Jesus who was led as a sheep to the slaughter; that same Jesus who said, "I am the Way;" that same Jesus who taught that salvation is a beautiful bridge of magnificent arches resting upon strong and polished pillars, stretching away from the very gates of death, spanning the whole history of man's apostasy from God, and still its last arch is resting upon the frontiers of glory. This is that Jesus who constructed the highway of glory to heaven, at the cost of his own blood, along which Christians travel where angels run to meet us. This Jesus, who said, "I am the way the truth and the life," is the one who will open the books and read the verdict.

WHEN THE BOOKS ARE OPENED ALL WILL BE PRESENT

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:31-33).

When the books are opened, Adam and Eve will be there; Cain and Abel will be there; all the people who have lived in all ages of the world will be there. The anti-diluvians, post-diluvians, Asiatic people, the

Caucasians, Africans, Indians, every race, every tribe and every nation, all the Shemites, Hamites and Japhethites will be there. The persecutors, crucifiers and tempters will stand as trembling culprits at this judicial bar. All His enemies will stand quaking beneath the majesty of His glory, and wait with insufferable woe the announcement of their doom. Those who have heard about Christ, and those who have never heard about Christ will be there. All the poor people and oppressed people will be there. All the little people and the great people, the kings, presidents, senators, judges, lawyers and potentates will be there when the books are opened.

Abraham will shake off the dust of Machpelah and stand there with Sara by his side. Moses will come from his unmarked grave over in the land of Moab. The mighty giants, the heroes, the Samsons, the Alexanders and the Caesars of the world will be there when those books are opened. The antiquated dead will come to life from their ashy urns and funeral pyres and will be present when the books are opened. Though earth and hell, men and demons join themselves together in opposition to the judgment day, that day is still coming, and the books will be opened.

In this life there is so much injustice, but when the books are opened, all wrongs will be made right, and all scores righteously and eternally settled. One by one the names will be called. One by one each will stand before God. One by one they will watch as their record is compared with the word of God. One by one they will see the book of life checked. One by one they will go to the right or the left, for one by one they will hear the verdict read. That verdict will read: "Enter ye into the joys of heaven; or depart from me I never knew you."

WHEN THE BOOKS ARE OPENED
THE WRATH OF GOD
WILL BE MANIFESTED TOWARD THE WICKED

I believe that the wrath of God, to some degree, is manifested toward the sinner in this life; but to what degree this takes place I do not know. I do know that in the future there will be a full and eternal retribution, which awaits the transgressor, where every one will receive according to his works. It is interesting to observe what the *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* and Josephus have to say about the wrath of God being manifested toward the wicked while they lived and also how the wicked died.

Herod the Great was the first persecutor of Christianity. He attempted to destroy Jesus Christ while he was but a child, and for that wicked purpose slew all the male children, who were two years old and under, that were in and about Bethlehem. What was the consequence? Josephus tells us that old Herod had long and grievous sufferings. He had a burning fever, a voracious appetite, a difficulty of breathing, swelling of his limbs, loathsome ulcers within and without, breeding vermin, violent torments and convulsions, so that he endeavored to kill himself but was restrained by his friends. The Jews thought those evils to be divine judgments upon him for his wickedness.

Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist, and treated Christ contemptuously when he was brought before him, was defeated by Aretas, an Arabian king, and afterwards had his dominions taken from him, and was sent into banishment along with his impious wife by the Emperor Cains.

Herod Agrippa, the one who killed James, the

brother of John, had Peter put in prison. The angel of the Lord soon after this smote Herod with worms, and he gave up the ghost.

Judas Iscariot, who betrayed our Lord, died by his own hands the most ignominious of all deaths.

Pontius Pilate, who condemned our blessed Savior to death, was soon thereafter deposed from his office, banished from his country and died by his own hands.

Caiaphas, the high priest, three years after the death of Christ, was deposed. Thus, this wicked man, who condemned Christ for fear of the Romans, was ignominiously turned out of his office by the Roman governor he sought to please.

Ananias, the high priest, persecuted Paul and arrogantly ordered the bystanders to smite him on the mouth. Upon which the apostle said, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." A short time after, Ananias was slain, together with his brother, by the hands of his own son.

Nero turned his rage upon Christians, putting them to death by torture, and blamed them for crimes that he had committed with his own hands. For years after, in his great distress, he attempted to kill himself; but being as dastardly as he was wicked and cruel, he was forced to beg assistance.

The Jewish nation, persecuted, rejected and crucified the Lord of glory. Within a few years after this wicked deed their nation was destroyed.

It is, no doubt, true that man suffers, to some degree, in this world for sins committed. But when the books are opened, there will be a final and eternal accounting. God will show the power of his strength by casting the wicked into hell. The strongest will have no power to resist him. There is no fortress that is

any defense from the power of God. God's enemies on that day will be as light chaff before the whirlwind; or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames. There are black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over the head of every wicked person. These clouds are full of thunder, lightning and wind of God's wrath. The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed up for the present. The water behind that dam will increase more and more and rise higher and higher: and when those books are opened that dam will break, and God's wrath will rush forth with inconceivable fury joined hand in hand with the omnipotent power of God. If your strength should be ten million times stronger than the most powerful demon in hell, you could not overthrow the wrath of God any more than a spider's web could keep a huge boulder from rolling down Pike's Peak. The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow is now on the string; and when the books are opened, the arrow of God's wrath will pierce the heart of every wicked sinner.

The Bible speaks often of the fury of God. In Isaiah we read: "For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire" (Isaiah 66:15). In Revelation we read of "the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:15). These words are exceedingly terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful; but it is "the fierceness and wrath of God." The fury of God! The fierceness and wrath of Jehovah! Oh, how dreadful must that be! "I have trodden the winepress alone: and of the people there

was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come" (Isaiah 63:3-4). My friend, notice those words, "anger", "trample", "fury", "vengeance". When those books are opened the wicked will plead for pity and mercy, but the day of mercy will be gone forever. God will have no mercy upon them but, instead, will trample them under his feet. Even though God knows that man cannot bear the weight of omnipotence, yet, he will crush the wicked under his feet without mercy until the blood is crushed from their bodies and until the blood flies and stains his garments.

"What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Rom. 9:22). The great and angry God will rise up and execute his awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretched sinner will suffer the infinite weight and power of his indignation; then God will call upon the whole universe to witness his awful majesty and mighty power in punishing the wicked. The wicked shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and while the wicked are in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look upon the awful spectacle that they may know what the wrath of God is; and when they see it, they will fall down and worship the Almighty God. "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth,

and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh" (Isaiah 66:23-24).

God is angry with the wicked every day. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castest them down into destruction" (Psalm 73:18). The sinner is walking on slippery places every minute of the day and is likely to fall any second. The wicked are hanging over the fires of hell by a thin thread that may be snapped by God's wrath at any moment. The wicked are compared to the troubled sea. "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isaiah 57:20).

How does the wicked sinner think he can stand before the one who has power to pick the earth up and shake it like a blanket or roll the heavens back like a scroll; the one who has the power to overturn mountains, upheave valleys and rupture strata? This is the one who will damn the wicked to an eternal hell. The devil is watching every wicked sinner, he stands like a greedy hungry lion watching his prey. The old serpent is now in his coil, hissing with his mouth open to receive them, and hell is ready to swallow them up.

WHEN THE BOOKS ARE OPENED
THE MERCY OF GOD WILL BE MANIFESTED
TO THE RIGHTEOUS

"For he will have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2:13). Those who have turned away from sin and lived dedicated lives will know and have a

full understanding, for the first time, of the abundant mercy and forgiveness of God. "And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:6). "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9). "And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart" (I Kings 8:23). "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever" (I Chronicles 16:34).

It is a glorious thought to know when the books are opened the mercy of God will save the righteous. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). The breadth of the mercy of God is as wide as the world. The mercy of God is the length of eternity, and eternity has no end. The depth of the mercy of God is deeper than the deepest part of the ocean. The height of God's mercy reaches all the way from earth to heaven. You might as well try to blow out the light of the sun as to try to blow out the mercy of the great and holy God toward the righteous on the day of judgment.

The merciful dedicated child of God need not fear the day when the books will be opened; on this day mercy will rejoice against judgment, for the Lord will be our judge, over whose cradle and at whose cross judgment and mercy met. If it were not for the mercy of God there would be no hope for any of us. The character of mercy may be found in the lines of Shakespeare that say:

*"The quality of mercy is not strained; It drop-
peth, as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place be-
neath. It is twice bless'd: It blesseth him that gives and
him that takes. 'Tis, mightiest in the mightiest: it be-
comes The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power, The
attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the
dread and fear of kings; But mercy is above this sceptred
sway. It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an at-
tribute to God himself; And earthly power doth then
show likest 'Gods,' When mercy seasons justice."*

The righteous will never fully know nor understand the love and mercy of God until we stand in the judgment and the books are opened. It would be impossible for man to perform enough good deeds to merit salvation. It is true that all accountable people must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of their sins, confess the name of Christ and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. This person must live a dedicated life before God; but after he has done all these things he is still an unprofitable servant and will be saved by the mercy of God (Luke 17:10).

IS YOUR NAME WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE?

"And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). "Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16). The thought of having our name written in

heaven is one of the most comforting, and beautiful and consoling thoughts that can enter the mind of man. Christ, in talking about this, said to His disciples, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:19-20). "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven . . ." (Hebrews 12:23).

HOW MAY WE KNOW OUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE?

The Lord writes our names there when we obey him. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). In verse forty-seven of the second chapter it says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Yes, those who obey the gospel have their names written in the Lamb's book of life, but those who refuse to obey God will never have their names written there.

My friends, I say to you without the least fear of exaggeration that many will never realize they are lost until those books are opened. Many will learn when the books are opened that the most important thing in life was not their job; it was not their home; it was not their loved ones; it was not their friends; it was not their money; it was not their property. The most important thing is your soul, and if you don't learn it in this world, you will learn it when the books are opened. "For what

is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matthew 16:26).

The opening of the books will be comforting to those who have obeyed God. Every tear we shed in this life is recorded in glory. Every prayer we pray is written in the book of life. Every dollar we give to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, preach the gospel, or to support Christian education is balanced on the scales of God. Every time we plead with an unsaved soul to obey God, this conversation is written in the archives of eternity and will be made known when the books are opened.

If your name is not written in the Lamb's book of life, I plead with you to come believing, repenting, confessing and to be baptized into the body of Christ. If your name is written in the Lamb's book of life, I pray that you may live and conduct yourself in such a way that your name may never be blotted out of the book of life.

BORN AGAIN TO WHAT?

We are living in an age when we hear people use the expression, "He is a born-again Christian," or, "I am a born-again Christian." If one is a Christian, he has been born again. And if one is born again, he is a Christian, that is, if he has not apostatized since he became a child of God. It would be impossible to be a Christian without being born again.

In John 3:1-5, "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

I. ONE IS BORN AGAIN TO LIVE A NEW LIFE.

II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new."

Let us notice that there is a new life to live. We put off the old man with all its filthy garments. We are to live such dedicated lives that people will see our lives and remember the words of Edgar A. Guest, who wrote the following, entitled:

Sermons We See

*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
 I'd rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.
 The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
 Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear;
 And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their
 creeds,
 For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.*

*I soon can learn to do it if you'll let me see it done;
 I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may
 run.
 And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,
 But I'd rather get my lessons by observing what you do;
 For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
 But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.*

*When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.
 When a weaker brother stumbles and a strong man stays behind
 Just to see if he can help him, then the wish grows strong in me
 To become as big and thoughtful as I know that friend to be.
 And all travelers can witness that the best of guides today
 Is not the one who tells them, but the one who shows the way.*

*One good man teaches many, men believe what they behold;
 One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.
 Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear,
 For right living speaks a language which to every one is clear.
 Though an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,
 I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one, any day.*

II. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO WEAR A NEW NAME.

Isaiah 60:3, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

Isaiah 62:2, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name."

The first gospel sermon ever preached in the name of the risen Christ was on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ from the grave. About 3,000 souls obeyed the gospel on this day. But they were not called by the name **Christian** until sometime later. When the gospel was preached to the Gentiles in Acts the tenth chapter, now notice, "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

When one is born again, he wears the name **Christian** without a handle.

In the year 60, when James wrote his epistle, they were called by a worthy or honorable name. In James 2:7, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?"

About the year 96, the Saviour, Himself, dictating the epistle to the church in Asia Minor used the expression; "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Revelation 2:3).

III. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO HAVE A NEW SPEECH.

The Christian does not talk like people of the world. He does not use ugly words or vulgar expressions. He does not speak unkindly of others, but speaks in a way to give others the benefit of the doubt. One says, "It is just my nature to be abrupt and short-spoken." Yes, and this individual has the nature of the devil. Association with the devil makes a person's speech unkind.

We all need to imitate Christ in our speech. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6).

"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and

perverse lips put far from thee" (Proverbs 4:24).

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

There may be a certain kind of power in hard-spoken words, but there is no power in such words to win people to Christ. The person, who has never learned to speak with grace, is like a wolf among innocent sheep. He can tear them to pieces with unkind words. "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

IV. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO HAVE A NEW ATTITUDE.

The old attitude of the world is to love your friends and hate your enemies. Jesus said, "And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:39).

The parable of the good Samaritan tells who our neighbor is, and how we are to treat him (Luke 10:30-37). The Christian has a good attitude toward all people. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

Most of the trouble, that I have observed in the Lord's church the forty years I have been preaching, has not arisen because of doctrinal matters, but over attitudes. If attitudes had been right, in most instances there would have been no trouble. After all we can always say that person is a liberal, if he does not see things as we see them.

When Jesus was talking to the woman at Jacob's

well, He said, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).

We have heard many sermons on these verses. The preacher will emphasize the importance of worshipping God – the right object. He will stress the importance of worshipping God in truth. All these are good and true, but we must not stop here. We must not only worship God and worship in truth, but we must worship in the right frame of mind. One cannot worship God in the right frame of mind with an ugly attitude toward his brethren or people in general.

It is just as important to worship God in the right frame of mind as it is to worship God in truth. When we learn this, we will grow spiritually. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). It would be impossible for one to obey this commandment without a good attitude.

It is not always easy to manifest a good attitude, but I must if I am to manifest the spirit of Christ. Some of the ugliest people, with whom I have dealt, have been members of the church, some of whom have set themselves up to preach!

The person who is born again enters into a land of beginning again. Louisa Fletcher wrote these words:

*"I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the land of beginning again;
Where all our mistakes, and all our heartaches,
And all our poor selfish grief,
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,
And never be put on again.*

*For what had been hardest, we'd know had been best,
And what had seemed loss would be gain;
For there isn't a sting that will not take wings
When we've faced it and laughed it away;
And I think that the laughter is most what we're after
In the land of beginning again."*

V. WE WERE BORN AGAIN TO IMITATE CHRIST.

The Christian life revolves around Christ. Peter encourages all Christians to imitate Christ. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Peter 2:21).

When a teacher gives a child some letters to copy, the teacher will print the letters at the top of the page, and tell the child to copy the letters. The best letters the child makes are not the ones at the bottom of the page, but the ones at the top of the page. Why? They are the ones closest to the example. As long as the child is looking at the example, the letters are good. But the child forgets to look at the example, and, instead, he looks at the letters he has just printed. If the child continues to do this, the letters at the bottom of the page will not even resemble the ones at the top. Why? The child got away from the example.

When we get away from Christ, our example, our lives cease to be beautiful. I do not believe Peter would have ever denied the Lord if he had stayed close to Him. Peter first followed afar off, and then denied the Lord. Peter even walked on the water as long as he kept his eyes on the Lord. But when he took his eyes off the Lord, he sank.

Paul said in I Corinthians 11:1, "Be ye followers

of me, even as I also am of Christ." To the very best of our ability, we should imitate Christ in all we do. Oh, the problems that would be solved, and the problems that would never arise, if we would only stay close to our Great Example, and imitate Him in our actions and in our speech.

VI. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO GROW IN KNOWLEDGE.

"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2).

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Hebrews 5:12).

It is sad indeed that so many of our brethren have been fed spiritual baby food with a small spoon so long, that when they hear a good strong sermon, it makes them sick. It is absolutely impossible for one to become strong physically without good strong wholesome food. It is also impossible for one to become strong spiritually without good strong teaching. If an individual eats nothing but sweets, he will become a sick man and die, if he continues to eat nothing but desserts.

If a congregation is fed nothing but spiritual cookies from the pulpit, the church will become sick, and will not be able to discern good from evil, or a faithful life from an unfaithful life. "Woe unto them

that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5:20).

The saddest thing in all the world is to see a dead preacher, preaching to a dead church the living word of God. Every congregation must be given a balanced diet. Every congregation on the face of the earth is just one generation away from apostasy. When a congregation goes for a period of time without hearing good strong lessons on repentance, confession, or baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or the identity of the church, or why we do not use mechanical instruments in our worship, it will not be long until this congregation will have drifted into an apostasy.

VII. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO GROW IN GOOD WORKS.

The Christian is to grow in good works. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). The individual, who is constantly doing good deeds, is rapidly developing into a strong spiritual man. The church that is doing good deeds is the church that grows. As we become stronger physically by taking physical exercise, we become stronger spiritually by taking spiritual exercise. When we fail to grow, we become invalids.

I remember preaching in a gospel meeting a few years ago, and I saw a girl who was twenty-seven years of age, who was about the size of a four-year old girl. She was still sleeping in a baby bed, and was having to be fed by her mother. It was sad, indeed, to see one in such a physical condition.

When a child of God fails to grow, there is something wrong with that person. I know members of the church, who are no stronger today than they were ten or twenty years ago. Such people are not an asset to the cause of Christ, but a liability.

If I should ask you, do you consider yourself stronger today than one year, or five years, or ten years ago, how would you answer? "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (II Peter 1: 12-15).

After Peter told them to add the Christian graces, he tells them that he is putting them in remembrance. Peter, no doubt, had talked to them about the Christian graces many times, but knew that the power of teaching was in **repetition**. Peter was saying, "I am going to talk to you about these things so much that after I am dead, you will remember them." This is the kind of teaching every preacher should do from the pulpit concerning faith, repentance, confession, baptism, the identity of the church, and Christian living. Our teaching should be such that the people may forget us, but they will not forget the lessons we taught.

VIII. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO GROW IN DIPLOMACY.

Christianity is kind and considerate. We

need to learn how to talk and act. Some church members can be so crude and uncouth.

Some time ago, I was having dinner with some people, and I asked about a certain person in the church. The general opinion of those around the table was this: he can't speak to you without insulting you. This was possibly an exaggerated statement of the case, but the person needed a lesson in diplomacy.

Christianity is thoughtful of other people, considerate of the feelings of other people.

There was a man who proved his diplomacy when asked by a widow to guess her age. He paused, and she said, "You must have some idea."

The man replied, "If I were to guess your age by your looks, I would guess you twenty years younger. If I were to guess your age by your intelligence, I would guess you twenty years older than you are."

Some seem to get a joy out of cutting someone down. There may be a certain power in it, but there is no power in it to win people to Christ.

Jesus said to His disciples, who were sent forth teaching His word. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents. and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

IX. WE ARE BORN AGAIN TO GROW OUT OF CHILDISH WAYS.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Corinthians 13:11).

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity” (I Corinthians 16:13-14).

Notice the strong admonition Paul gives:

1. “Watch ye”, that is, be alert.
2. “Stand fast in the faith”, that is, don’t give an inch in doctrinal matters.
3. “Quit ye like men”, that is, act like a full-grown soldier.
4. “Be strong”, that is, in time of battle play a hero’s part.

Notice the next admonition:

5. “Let all things be done in love.”

It is characteristic of a child to want every thing done his way. If he cannot get his way, he throws a tantrum.

Some members of the church are like that. If they can’t get their way, they throw a tantrum, and other members give in to them.

Physical adults can be spiritual babies. They cry, “Wait on me; serve me; keep me happy.” These have need of milk and not strong meat.

What would you think of a grown man, who weighed 220 pounds, sitting on his mother’s lap, twiddling his thumbs and kicking his feet while his mother is holding his bottle for him? Ridiculous! Yes, but no more so than a grown, spoiled child of God having to be catered to every day to keep him coming to the services of the church.

The Christian life that we are to live teaches one how to die. A young girl lay fatally ill. When she was told that she could not live, she said to her mother,

“You taught me to dance; you taught me how to dress; you taught me how to live like the world; but you never taught me how to die. Now, I must die.”

Christianity not only teaches one how to live, it also teaches one how to die. Death to a Christian is his coronation day. “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

HEAVEN, AND WHY I WANT TO GO THERE

John 14:1-6, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

All civilized people are concerned about what lies beyond the grave. Even the uncivilized people dream of a land where there will be no sickness or disappointments.

In some parts of the world men request that their weapons be buried with them that they may be prepared for the happy hunting ground. Records dug up from the mud of Mesopotamia, the jungles of Mexico, or the Nile River show that people are concerned about another world after this one.

Job asked in the long ago, "If a man die, will he live again?"

Our Lord proved beyond all doubt that man will live again. Jesus Christ went with the pale monarch of death into the silent darkness of the grave, and while there he broke his crown, took the key and chained the monster of death to his chariot wheels and rode aloft to heaven and shouted as he went through the air, "I have the keys of death, hell and the grave in my hands."

Bob Ingersol, noted infidel, entered into an agreement with his younger brother Ralph that they would not have the clergy to speak at their funerals. The surviving brother should make the remarks. Bob was some years older than Ralph and never dreamed it would fall his duty to make the speech. Ralph was stricken down at a tender age, and Bob kept his word.

The following is what Bob said at his brother's grave:

"Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond those heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word. In the night of death hope sees a star and listening love can hear the rustle of the wings of death. He who sleeps here, when dying, mistaking the approach of death for the return of health, whispers in his latest breath, 'I am better now.' Let us all believe, in spite of doubts, dogmas, fears and tears, that these words are true of all the countless dead."

Genesis 5:24, "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

A Sunday school teacher was talking to a first grade class of children. He asked one little boy what this passage meant. The little boy replied, "A long, long time ago, God came down and met Enoch. God said to Enoch, 'Let us take a walk.' So God and Enoch walked through the hills and valleys and through the forest. Enoch said, 'God, I am tired.' God said to Enoch, 'We are so far from your house just come and go home with me.' And Enoch went and lived with God."

This was a child's understanding of what it

means when the Bible says, "And God took him."

Peter said in I Peter 1:4, "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

Paul, in speaking of Abraham, said in Hebrews 11:8-10, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

John in talking about heaven said, "And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. And the city had no need of the sun, neither the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it. The gates shall not be shut for there is no night there. He showed me a pure river of water of life clear as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb. There shall be no night there. They shall reign forever and ever."

These beautiful expressions of what heaven is like creates within us a stronger desire to live forever in that city that is fairer than day.

Heaven is a prepared place. Yes, heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you."

There are certain preparations a person must

make in order to go to heaven. Man must believe on Christ. In John 8:24, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." If I want to go to heaven, I have no choice but to believe on Jesus Christ. I should rejoice to believe on His name.

In order for a man to prepare to go to heaven, he must repent. Luke 13:3, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." If a person is sincere about going to heaven, he will not argue about repentance but rejoice to do it because Jesus commanded it.

Preparation to go to heaven requires confession on the part of man. Matthew 10:32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."

Can you conceive of a man who claims he wants to go to heaven, but says I do not want to confess the name of Jesus?

One must be baptized in order to make preparation to go to heaven. Listen to Jesus Christ who has gone to prepare a place for us. Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Acts 10:48, "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

After one is baptized into Christ as we are taught to do in Galatians 3:27, one is to live a faithful life. I Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Matthew 6:33, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Revelation 2:10. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

God said to His people in the long ago, "O, Israel, prepare to meet thy God."

Since Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, is it unreasonable for us to believe that we must prepare ourselves in order to go to this place?

I want to go to heaven because I am invited. I do not want to go any place where I am not invited. All people appreciate invitations. If you should get an invitation from the President of the United States to come to Washington and dine with him, no doubt, you would talk about this for months.

Think of the Son of God, who is the Prince of Peace and the Priest of the most High God condescending to extend an invitation to sinful man. Listen to His invitation. Matthew 11:28-30, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

When Jesus was upon earth, the people refused to accept this invitation. When Jesus stood on the Mount of Olives and looked over the ruined city of Jerusalem, He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killeth the prophets and stoneth them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate."

I am thankful for the invitation, and I am glad I have accepted it. Have you accepted this invitation by the Lord Jesus Christ?

In John 5:40 Jesus said, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

The very fact that Jesus Christ extends to mortal man the invitation teaches us that man can accept that invitation. It would be unfair; it would be cruel for God to say to man, "Come unto me", and then at the same time man could not do it.

Suppose, for instance, that I should take a little girl, three or four years old, and tie her to a stake which had been driven into the ground. Then I would take a beautiful doll, that this child would like to have, and stand some twelve or fifteen feet away from her. While holding this beautiful doll in my hand, I would say to this child, "Come unto me, and I will give you this doll." One would say, "That would be cruel. Why would you tantalize that little child by offering her a doll when you know she could not accept it?"

I state to you that it would be cruel for God to say unto us, "Come unto me and I will give you rest," if it were impossible for man to accept this invitation.

I want to go to heaven because of the rest. Life is a race. Hebrews 12:1, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Notice the Bible says we are to run the race. When an individual runs a race, he is tired. Rest is sweet indeed to that person.

Solomon speaks of the man who works all day in the hot sun and then describes the rest that person enjoys. Ecclesiastes 5:12, "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep."

Life is a battle. The person who is faithful to

Christ has many battles to fight. So many times the battle rages, and the fighting is rough. We become weary and battle-worn. If we are good soldiers, there is waiting for us a rest that passes all understanding. One day we can lay aside the battle-scarred armor, hang up our spiritual weapons, and associate with all the saved throughout all the ages with the Lord. It will be sweet indeed for all who have worn themselves out in the service of the Lord. Yes, there is rest in store for the faithful, dedicated soldiers of Christ.

I want to go to heaven because of the understanding. We sing the song, "Farther along we'll know all about it, farther along we'll understand why." We sing this song because we all know that there are so many things in this old sinful world that we do not understand.

We do not know why a child is born blind, deaf or mentally retarded. Several years ago I was preaching in a gospel meeting, and after the service one night a young couple came up to me with a small child in the mother's arms. They said, "Brother Black, we want to ask you a question. Why did this happen to us? We are faithful members of the church. We try hard to serve God and please Him. We have borrowed money and spent all we have accumulated to take our child to noted doctors but to no avail. Why did this happen to us?"

I replied, "I don't understand it, but some day we will know all about it."

I do not understand why a mother dies and leaves her child at the very time the child needs her most. I cannot understand why a father dies and leaves several children who need him to provide for them. This old world is filled with sorrow, sickness, disappointment and pain. We see poverty, afflicted

people and so many things we cannot understand.

There have been things which happened in my own life that I could not understand. At times when I would be doing my very best, there were those who criticized, and I cannot understand this. But in heaven I will be able to look back and have a perfect understanding of it all.

Just as those parents who had the afflicted child, one day, if they faithfully serve the Lord, in heaven they can look back and have a perfect understanding of everything that was so difficult for them to understand in this world.

I want to go to heaven to be with all the obedient people. The people in heaven will be there because they have loved, respected and obeyed God's law.

Revelation 22:14, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

Luke 6:46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Matthew 7:24-25, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock."

When we think of those who will be in heaven, we think of Abraham, Noah, Paul, Peter, John and all others who have obeyed God.

Every person in heaven will be there because of his obedience to the commands of God.

Hebrews 11:7, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear,

prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

Hebrews 11:8, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

We could go on and on telling about the faithful children of God. In every case where the people pleased God, they were obedient to Him.

When the Lord commands confession, we must confess His name. When the Lord commands baptism, we must be baptized. When the Lord commands us to be faithful, we must be faithful to Him if we want to live with all the redeemed of all the ages. One cannot conceive of anyone being in heaven who stubbornly and willfully refused to obey the commands of God, whether they related to faith, repentance, confession, baptism or the commands that relate to the children of God.

I want to go to heaven because of its beauty. There are so many beautiful things in this world of nature, the gorgeous hues of the butterfly or the gold on the robin's breast. We stand in awe as we admire the beauty of the azaleas, the beauty of the rose, the dreamy white of the lily, or the thousand colors of the rainbow.

I have been through the Smoky Mountains and saw where the God of nature bowed and kissed the brow of beauty. I've seen the snowy range of Wyoming where nature adorned herself as a bride for her husband. I have been through Carlsbad Caverns and looked upon things that would render the tongue of an orator speechless. I have stood on old Pike's Peak and looked thousands of feet below and observed the

handiwork of God in the landscaping of nature. I have seen the sunset as it seems to sink in the ocean. I have seen the sun rise over the Alps, a picture which no artist is able to paint. I have been in the Smoky Mountains and have seen the floating clouds under the moon, where the moon looked like a yellow jonquil in a garden of diamonds. I have seen the stars come out over the black mountains of the Carolinas, dance and portray their beauty in the light of the moon.

Having seen all these things, I know that I have never seen anything that compares to the beauty of heaven. I feel more inadequate when I talk about the beauties of heaven than I do when I am discussing any other subject.

I read of a little girl who was born blind and lived in total darkness until she was six years old. Her parents had taken her from one noted physician to another. Finally they heard of a prominent doctor, and they took the child to him.

The doctor performed surgery, and the child's sight was restored. The first thing the little girl said to her mother was, "Why did you not tell me how beautiful you are?" When she saw her little brother, she said, "Why did you not tell me how pretty my brother is?" Everytime she saw something such as the trees, the moon, or the stars, she would say, "Why didn't you tell me how pretty these things are?" The mother said, "I tried to tell you, but I could not explain the beauty of these things to you."

Oh, when we get to heaven and walk down those streets of gold with John, we, no doubt, will say, as we look at the beauties of heaven, "John, why didn't you tell us how beautiful heaven is?" John, no doubt, will say, "I tried to tell you, but I had to use words

that you could understand, but with your finite minds you could not understand."

A farmer, who had never been out of his native county, visited a large city and saw the tall buildings and wonders of the city. When he returned home, his children asked him, "Daddy, what is the city like?" He thought to himself, "How can I describe the city to my children?"

Then he took his children down in back of the house to the barn, for the barn was two stories high. He looked at the barn and told his children, "Those skyscrapers looked like that barn. They were big and tall like the barn."

Of course you and I know that the barn had mighty little resemblance to the beautiful skyscrapers of the city. The farmer had nothing else with which to compare them, and so he was doing his best to describe the beauties of the city.

When I try to describe the beauties of heaven I feel about like the farmer. Oh, how beautiful heaven must be! We cannot describe the beauty of that place.

I want to go to heaven because of the companionship. When we get to heaven, we will live with all the righteous of all the ages. Think what it will be like to sit down by the river of life and hear Abraham tell of the time he offered Isaac. It will be interesting to hear Job tell of his trials, or to hear Josiah tell of the restoration he brought about.

I want to hear Onesiphorus tell of his search for the apostle Paul. I want to hear Paul tell about his missionary journeys. I want to hear Peter tell about his life as a Christian. I want to see all the other apostles and hear them tell of their experiences in serving Christ. Think of the companionship of heaven!

There will be Enoch, Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, David, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Isaac, Jacob, the apostles, and all the righteous of all the ages. What a wonderful company this will be!

But there is one I want to see above all others. There is One and this One is the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to fall down before Him and ask Him why would He die for such an unworthy creature as V. P. Black. Yes, I want to go to heaven when this life is over.