

THE GREATEST CAUSE

By

MAXIE B. BOREN

**WORLD LITERATURE
PUBLICATIONS**

**Post Box 3815
New Delhi 110049**

First Printing, 2,000 Copies
Printed in India, 1993
Art Work, K.L. Verma
Proof Read by Carolyn Blake

Printed by
PRINT INDIA
Mayapuri
New Delhi-64

INTRODUCTION

There are preachers and there are leaders among preachers. Bro. Maxie Boren is one of those. He has distinguished himself both as a local worker and as an evangelist, being in great demand for meetings in many States across America. He has also served as the Director of Brown Trail School of Preaching near Ft. Worth, TX.

My wife and I first met bro. Boren in Corsicana, TX where he was preaching for the local church. We were impressed with him at that time and have appreciated him and his work ever since.

Along with his preaching work, bro. Boren has found occasion to write prolifically. Knowing the value of his writings, I asked him for permission to print a volume here in India. He responded by submitting the materials for this book. He also said that he would like to accompany me to India some time to preach the gospel personally. We look forward to the time when this can be done.

With these words of introduction, we commend bro. Boren and his writings to you.

J.C. Choate
Church of Christ
New Delhi 110049
Nov. 1, 1992

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THERE IS A GOD!

The evidence is overwhelming! There is indeed a Living God! From the vast expanse of space to the myriad forms of life on this earth, a convincing testimony of Divine creation resounds!

The very fact that the universe exists challenges our mental faculties. The reality of it all, and in particular this terrestrial body upon which we live, seeks from our minds an explanation! Think! Try to comprehend it! How did the universe come to be? And especially the earth? And life in its countless forms?

After much pondering, every possible explanation boils down to two basic understandings. Either—

- (1) The universe is a result of some unknown, inexplicable, chance combination of interacting forces, which at some point in time billions of years ago “somehow” brought it into existence; with life evolving from nonlife—

OR

- (2) The universe is by purpose and design of an All-Powerful Being (God) who made it, creating life in its innumerable variety by His infinite knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

Meditate searchingly! Think long and hard! Is the first “explanation” logical? Does it really make good sense to you? To my mind it is preposterous! It is inconceivable to imagine that the vastness, the order, the complexity, and the magnificence of all we know to exist “just happened” by some blind chance of

interacting "forces." If something so incredible as this did happen, just where did these "forces" come from? To say the least, such an "explanation" is most farfetched, and the probability of it being true is so remote as to be incalculable.

The second explanation is ten thousand times more plausible! Admittedly, it is a matter of "faith" to accept the existence of God. But remember, the atheistic philosophy is a matter of "faith" too. The difference is that "belief in God" as Creator is much more sensible than "belief in chance" as the answer! As for me, I believe with all my heart that there is a God, and that He created the heavens and the earth. I stand in awe of His greatness, and praise and honor Him. I am not ashamed of my faith in God, nor of my life's purpose to serve Him.

THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD

Accepting the existence of God, it is reasonable to believe that He would reveal His will to the pinnacle of His creative genius—humankind! This is exactly what He has done in the Book of books—the Bible! My profound conviction is that the Bible is truly God's revelation to us.

Faith in the Bible as the word of God is well founded. An in-depth investigation of "how we got the Bible" reveals significant and substantial evidence that the Book is God-given! For example, volumes of data from history and archaeology support the Bible's authenticity. And the very fact of its survival through the centuries, though its enemies have bitterly

attacked it and have made stringent efforts to destroy it, says a great deal! Today, it still lives, and flourishes more than ever! Also, the Bible has been translated into more languages and dialects by far than any other book in all history! This should tell the perceptive and inquiring person much. Why would this be?—how could this be?—if the Bible were just a book written by men, and not given by the direction of God?

These, and many other reasons, cause me to believe in the inspiration of the Bible. There is really no other way to plausibly account for the Bible than to conclude that it is indeed the product of Divine inspiration, and protecting Providence. Therefore, I believe that Almighty God has been the guiding Hand in the giving, preservation, and distribution of His Book among humankind.

The Bible towers above all other books combined, and has been so recognized by many, many of the most prominent figures of history. They, and hundreds of millions of ordinary people have realized and acknowledged that the Bible is indeed the word of God! Why would this be true if there was not ample reason for such belief?

Thus, in this message from my heart to yours, special attention is directed to what the Bible has to say! Since references will be cited from both the Old Testament, and the New Testament, for your convenience I hereby supply you a listing of the two divisions, and the books within each:

Old Testament

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuter-

onomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obediah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—a total of 39 books within the Old Testament, written over a period of time from about 1500 to 400 B.C.

New Testament

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, First and Second Peter, First, Second, and Third John, Jude, and Revelation—a total of 27 books within the New Testament, written over a period of time from about 40 to 100 A.D.

You will be given the exact book, chapter, and verse (or verses) in the Bible from which the quotations found in the message are taken, so that you may look up these references and study them for yourself. I have used more than one translation of the Bible in the preparation of this material and have frequently employed a combination form from these in trying to make the truth as plain as can be. It has been my desire to present the most accurate and simplest understanding possible of the Biblical text.

Because of my implicit trust in the inerrancy of the Scriptures . . . because I believe that God has given the Bible to us to guide, direct, and lead us in the right way, I strongly urge you to study it and learn for yourself what God's will for us is.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. . ." Second Timothy 3:16.

"Study to show yourself approved of God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." Second Timothy 2:15.

HUMAN BEINGS—THE PINNACLE OF GOD'S CREATION—ACCOUNTABLE TO HIM

As already expressed, I believe that God, the Supreme Sovereign of this universe made everything. I, for one, grow sick at heart when He is "left out" by so many in their pathetic attempts to explain this fantastic world without Him. Let us give God the credit and praise that is due Him! He is creator of it all!

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Genesis 1:1

“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” Psalm 33:6,8-9.

“The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture . . .” Psalm 95:5-7.

“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. . .” Psalm 96:8.

On the sixth day of creation, God made man and woman in His own image. He made human beings superior to all other creatures. And of all the creatures God made, human beings are the only ones endowed by their Creator with an immortal “spark of life”—the soul, or spirit. It is this “soul” that is in the “image of God.”

“And God said, let us [i.e., the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit] make man in our own image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” Genesis 1:26-27.

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Genesis 2:7.

No other creature was given the faculties, the capacities, the potential, and the dignity that God gave each human being. No doubt about it—humankind is the pinnacle of God's creative genius and power!

Each person has a spiritual entity (i.e., being, existence) as well as a physical entity. The physical side of a person shall die, but the spiritual entity shall exist forever. Thus, the Bible teaches the accountability of the human soul to God. It tells us of the judgement to come, and of the eternal separation between the righteous and the wicked. Consider carefully:

“... it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgement.” Hebrews 9:27.

“... for we shall all stand before the judgement—seat of God... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Romans 14:10b, 12.

God “has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man [i.e., Christ] whom he hath ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he has raised him from the dead.” Acts 17:31.

“For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is

due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." Second Corinthians 5:10.

The Bible speaks of the righteous judgement of God, who "will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil...but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good... For God does not show favoritism." Romans 2:5-11.

The wicked "shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life." Matthew 25:46.

The Bible plainly teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ will most assuredly come again to bring vengeance upon the ones who have rejected God and His offer of grace through the gospel. The teaching of eternal punishment, or hell, is plainly presented in the Scriptures:

The apostle Paul, in writing to persecuted Christians, said, "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and

do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the Majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." Second, Thessalonians 1:6-10a.

The apostle Peter wrote, "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell, and committed them to gloomy dungeons to be held for judgement; and did not spare the ancient world . . . when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and . . . condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly." Second Peter 2:4-6. And continuing, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and its works will be burned up." Second Peter 3:10.

Other Scripture references to read and consider on this subject are Matthew 5:22, Matthew, 10:28, Revelation 6:12-17, Revelation, 14:9-11, and Revelation 20:10, 15.

I fully realize that many people scoff at the Biblical doctrine of the judgement, and of eternal punishment in hell, but that doesn't alter the fact that it is true! In His word to us, God said what He meant to say, and He meant what He said! My friend, you can be assured of that! Make no mistake about it—

don't be deceived by anyone who makes mockery of what the Bible teaches. As the Psalmist said—

“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.” Psalm 118:8.

We need to be keenly aware of our accountability to God! We need to know and be reminded that the judgement is coming! We each shall experience eternity; and eternity is defined this way: “from everlasting to everlasting; time without any beginning or ending.” Think about that! Your soul is the most valuable possession you have! Don't be careless with it! Regardless of what you may achieve or obtain on earth, if you lose your soul at the judgement you are the eternal loser!

Jesus asked, “What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and yet lose his own soul?” Matthew 16:26.

But Christians—those saved from sin by the grace of God—need not fear the coming judgement. These can rejoice with glad anticipation and happy expectation at the Lord's return! Because the Bible teaches that not only will Christ bring: Divine wrath upon those who know not God and who have rejected the gospel, but that He will receive unto Himself those who have been His faithful followers on earth. The Scriptures tell us of the beautiful city of heaven which shall be the everlasting abode of the redeemed.

Jesus told His disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not true, 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 you may be also." John 14:1-3.

Through the great mercy and grace of God, and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and His subsequent resurrection from the dead, the Christian can look forward to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." First Peter 1:3-4.

A number of other passages of Scripture give us additional information about eternal life, or heaven. Among them are Second Corinthians 5:1-8, First Thessalonians 4:13-17, and Revelation 7:14-17. Please read these in your Bible. Heaven is a reality, and the righteous will live there forever!

With all this in mind, I plead with you to carefully, and prayerfully, consider the remainder of this message from my heart to yours.

SIN—THE PROBLEM OF HUMANKIND

The Old Testament Scriptures introduce us to the problem of sin and its destructive consequences. The New Testament Scriptures give us additional pertinent information.

In Genesis 3, we have the record of Adam and

Eve eating the forbidden fruit. While permitting them to eat of every other tree in the garden of Eden, God had told them not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". God warned them that if they did, the penalty would be death. But they succumbed to the enticements of Satan and transgressed—they did the very thing that God had told them not to do. They thus, "sinned." And because of their sin, they had to pay the penalty, which was death.

It was through this transgression of Adam and Eve that sin first entered into the world, and death came into the world also, as a result of sin. And ever since, in all of Adam and Eve's posterity which have reached an "age of accountability," sin has transpired. Thus, the problem of sin, and its consequences (i.e., death), is worldwide.

"And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat; for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16-17.

"And the serpent [i.e., Satan] said unto the woman, "You shall not surely die." Genesis 3:4
Please note: Satan told the first lie. Satan is the "father of lies." John 8:44.

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit of it, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Genesis 3:6.

“Every one who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.” First John 3:4.

“All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23.

“Therefore, as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” Romans 5:12.

“The wages of sin is death.” Romans 6:23.

“Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” James 1:13-15.

Death is actually a “separation”. Physical death is the separation of the human spirit from the body. When the spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. Earthly life ceases to be at this point. In like manner, “spiritual death” is a separation. When a person departs from a right relationship with God by committing sin, “spiritual death” is the result. At such time there is a cessation of spiritual life. Consider:

“... the body without the spirit is dead...” James 2:26.

The prophet Isaiah indicted the wicked people of his day by saying, "... your iniquities have made a separation between you and God, and your sins have hid his face from you ..." Isaiah 59:2.

God had warned Adam and Eve that they would die in the day they ate the forbidden fruit. And they did indeed! They died spiritually that very day! God drove them out of the garden of Eden, and thus, away from His holy presence. Read Genesis 3:23-24. They therefore, were separated from God. Their right relationship with their Creator had been broken because of sin (i.e., lawlessness—transgression of God's will).

Not only did Adam and Eve die that day spiritually, but God also placed the curse of physical death upon them and all humankind because of sin.

"... dust you are, and unto dust you shall return." Genesis 3:19.

The dust shall "return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Ecclesiastes 12:7.

While we all must die physically because of what Adam and Eve did, we die spiritually only for our own sins. Each person is responsible for himself, spiritually. The theology that teaches we inherit the "guilt" of Adam's sin is false theology! We do inherit the "consequence" of Adam's sins, but not the "guilt", and there is a great difference. To illustrate the difference, envision a drunken husband and father who comes home, and in a rage beats his wife and

children. The wife and children indeed suffer the consequence of his drunkenness, but it would be absurd to say they are guilty of it! People die physically because of Adam's sin, but they die spiritually because of their own personal sins.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son..."
Ezekiel 18:20.

Many people today laugh at sin and make a big joke out of it, and try to make others think it is not so bad. Don't be deceived—sin is devastating! It can cause you to lose your soul throughout all eternity. Sin brings death! Death means separation. Therefore, eternal death is everlasting separation from God, and from all that is good, and right, and true. Hell is no joking matter!

"Fools make a mock at sin." Proverbs 14:9.

While Satan masquerades as a friend, he is really the very worst enemy we have. Satan is seeking the eternal ruination of every human soul by tempting and enticing to sin. But the Bible warns:

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith . . ." First Peter 5:8.

"Be not deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but

he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." Galatians 6:7-8.

"Submit yourselves, therefore, to God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you." James 4:7.

JESUS CHRIST, THE SAVIOUR

In the context of "sin and death" in Genesis 3, we get our first glimpse at the remedy for sin that God had in His infinite mind. Verse 15 informs us that the "seed of woman" would "bruise the head" of the serpent. The Bible identifies for us who the "seed of woman" is, and also who the "serpent" is:

(1) The "seed of woman" undoubtedly refers to Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us concerning His virgin birth . . . Jesus had no human father: "In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God

will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How can this be', Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God . . .'" Luke 1:26-35. Read carefully in your Bible the following Scripture context also: Matthew 1:18-23. And note carefully the wording of what the apostle Paul wrote. ". . . when the fulness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman . . ." Galatians 4:4. Jesus is the "seed of woman" mentioned in Genesis 3:15. He is the only begotten Son of God; He had no earthly father; he was born of the virgin Mary.

(2) The "serpent" unquestionably refers to Satan. In the context of Revelation 12:7-9, the Bible identifies "the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world . . ."

Obviously then, Genesis 3:15 is a prophetic picture of the victory Christ would gain over Satan by living a sinless life and triumphing over Satan's most potent weapon—death! Jesus arose from the dead! He thus conquered Satan!

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." First John 3:8.

The apostle Paul wrote that He "was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrec-

tion from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, even Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 1:4.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades." Revelation 1:18.

Beyond any doubt, Jesus is the mighty Deliverer! He is the Saviour! To establish this great truth in your heart, let me share with you a few references from the New Testament that teach us that Jesus existed in times eternal with God the Father, took upon Himself the form of flesh through the virgin birth and lived upon this earth for the purpose of saving us from sin!

"In the beginning was the Word [i.e., Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, He was with God in the beginning . . . The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ . . ." John 1:1-2, 14, 17.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world might be saved through him." John 3:16-17.

"This is how God showed his love toward us; He sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [i.e., the atoning sacrifice to appease God's wrath, and to satisfy His divine justice] for our sins." First John 4:9-10.

At the birth of Jesus, the angel announced: "I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord . . ." Luke 2:10-11.

"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . ." First Timothy 1:15.

Jesus was truly the Lamb of God. He was the perfect sacrifice for sins, and He gave Himself for our sins! He Himself never committed sin, but became the sin-offering for us. Thus, our redemption (i.e., being purchased back from our voluntary enslavement to Satan through sinning) has been made possible only through the sacrificial blood shed by Jesus in our behalf on the cross. Our being reconciled to God is possible only because Christ atoned for our sins on the cross! Please note carefully the following Scriptures:

John the baptizer introduced Jesus by saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world." John 1:29.

“God commendeth his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”
Romans 5:8-11.

The apostle Peter told Christians they had been redeemed from sin, not by silver or gold, “but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ.” First Peter 1:18-19.

Again, the same apostle informs us that Christ carried “our sins in his body upon the tree [i.e., the cross], that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.” First Peter 2:24.

The apostle Paul wrote to Christians and said, concerning Christ, that He “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father . . .” Galatians 1:4.

Jesus “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”
Hebrews 9:26.

The apostle Paul recorded these profound words:

“Him [Christ] who had no sin, he [God] made him to be sin [i.e., to carry the full burden of our sins] on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” Second Corinthians 5:21.

“ . . . because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” Ephesians 2:4.

For further enlightenment on this great theme, please read in your Bible such Scriptures as Colossians 1:13-23, Hebrews 7:22-28, Hebrews 9:11-28, Hebrews 10:1-12, Ephesians 1:3-7, and Philippians 2:5-11.

The Bible teaches that the gospel (i.e., the good news about Jesus and what He did for us) is God's power to save. And the very “heart and center” of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins, and that He was raised from the dead through the power of Almighty God for our justification, and exalted to God's right hand where He lives to make intercession for His followers, and to be our Advocate, Mediator, and High Priest. This is indeed good news!

Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes it . . .” Romans 1:16.

And again, “. . . the message of the cross is foolishness to them that are perishing, but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.” First

Corinthians 1:18.

And in the same letter, Paul wrote, "Now brethren, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for your sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." First Corinthians 15:1-4.

The Bible teaches that Christ "was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification." Romans 4:25.

In speaking of Jesus, the inspired writer said, "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Hebrews 1:3b.

Peter wrote of Him, that He "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him." First Peter 3:22.

The apostle Paul wrote, "...there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." First Timothy 2:5.

Concerning Jesus, we are informed, "...because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our needs—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens." Hebrews 7:24-26.

And the apostle John penned these words to Christians: "... If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." First John 2:1.

If Christ had not been willing to give Himself as the sacrifice for sins, there would be no forgiveness, and no hope of eternal life. But He was willing, and He did in fact die on the cross to atone for our sins! He was then buried, but Almighty God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand. Thus, through Christ, our sins can be forgiven! We can be saved from the penalty of death that our sins deserve! There is, in Christ, assurance of the resurrection unto life eternal! That is great news! That is the gospel! No one can be saved apart from it!

Thus, Jesus commanded His apostles: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:15-16.

Through the incomprehensible love of God, His mercy, and His grace, salvation is offered to everyone

in and through Jesus Christ! Because Jesus was willing to die in our stead, good news of salvation can be proclaimed!

“And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love . . .” First John 4:16-17a.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Second Corinthians 8:9.

Jesus is the Savior, and salvation can be possessed as a reality in one's life only in Christ! Outside of Jesus Christ there is no salvation from sin! There is no other way into the eternal presence of God except through Jesus Christ! All spiritual blessings are in Christ. There are none outside of Him, or apart from Him. He saves those who believe and obey. It's just that simple.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.” John 14:6.

In speaking of Jesus, Peter affirmed, “Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

The apostle Paul taught explicitly that every spiritual blessing is “in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3.

Christ is the author of eternal salvation “unto all

them that obey him." Hebrews 5:9.

WHAT THEN, MUST BE OUR RESPONSE?

Before a person will do anything about his spiritual needs, he must first realize his lost condition. He must be made aware that sin has caused a "separation" between himself and God. In other words, a person must be "convicted of sin." This is accomplished as one learns God's word, either by reading it right out of the Bible or in a writing such as this, or by hearing it proclaimed by a faithful preacher of the gospel.

Not only must there be a realization of one's lost condition, but there must also be exposure to the gospel message—that forgiveness and salvation may be obtained in Jesus Christ!

The sinner who is not aware of his lost condition has little or no concern for his own soul's welfare. But for the individual who has become cognizant of sin and its terrible consequences, and of his own lost condition, there is joy in believing the good news of salvation in Christ! Such an individual has come to recognize the peril of his spiritual situation. He has learned that apart from Christ he is lost! It is, therefore, an urgent matter that he accepts the great salvation provided by the love and mercy of God without delay!

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Hebrews 2:3.

"I tell you, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." Second Corinthians 6:2.

Faith, then, is the initial response of a human heart to God's offer of grace and mercy extended to us through the atoning merit of Christ's sacrifice for us. Faith in God the Father, and faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son is essential to a person's being saved from sin!

"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 seek after him." Hebrews 11:6.

And Jesus said, "except you believe that I am he; you shall die in your sins." John 8:24.

The Bible puts much emphasis on one's personal faith. It is necessary. It is the underlying basis of being acceptable to God. This is gleaned from reading both the Old and New Testaments.

The great man, Abraham, is a noble example of a person who deeply believed in God, and trusted God's directives. But we need to be careful to note that Abraham's faith was not just an idle belief, but an expressive, motivating force that prompted him to be obedient to God. Thus, obedience to God is as important as faith in Him. A faith that fails to obey is a dead faith. But Abraham's faith was a living faith that obeyed.

"For what does the Scripture say? 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned [i.e., credited]

unto him as righteousness.' " Romans 4:3.

Paul wrote of Abraham, saying "... he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. Wherefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness." Romans 4:20-22.

When God tested Abraham's faith by instructing him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, he set about to do what God told him to do. That is obedient faith, and God was pleased with Abraham. Upon observing Abraham's willingness to do as He had appointed, God stopped him short of taking Isaac's life. Read Genesis 22:1-12.

But that God wanted us to see faith and obedience being expressed together, is clear from noting that one of the inspired writers of the New Testament recorded the incident with these words: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works [i.e. obedience] in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone." James 2:21-24.

"Saving faith," therefore, is expressive faith—

faith that obeys God! The Bible does not teach the doctrine of "salvation by faith alone." In fact, it teaches just the opposite—one is not saved by "faith alone." Notice again the above quotation from James.

I doubt that it would be possible to over-emphasize the importance of one's personal faith, or He who is the object of that faith. One's trust in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and as the Savior, is of paramount importance—faith in the atoning efficacy of His blood!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, and said, "being justified freely by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood . . ." Romans 3:24-25.

Thus, "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1.

While emphasizing the necessity of faith, let us not minimize the importance and necessity of obedience. To negate the importance of obedience while holding to the doctrine of "salvation by faith alone" is folly! Faith and obedience go together, and together form the proper and complete response that a person should make to God's offer of salvation through Christ.

If there is any one thing plainly and repeatedly taught throughout the Bible it is the importance of obedience to God! From Genesis through Revelation, this fact is emphasized again and again. Lets us note just a few of the many Scriptures which could be

Moses said to the nation of Israel, "You shall be careful to do therefore as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you . . ." Deuteronomy 5:32-33.

And again he said to them, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and a curse, if you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God . . ." Deuteronomy 11:26-28.

The wise king Solomon said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Jesus said, "Not everyone that says unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 7:21.

Jesus made it plain that only those who obey the will of God are His spiritual kinsmen. Read Matthew 12:50.

"Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep, it." Luke 11:28.

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.” James 1:22.

Jesus is the author (i.e., source of) salvation “unto all them that obey him.” Hebrews 5:9.

Jesus Christ, as Lord, gave some conditions of pardon, and a person's salvation is contingent upon recognizing these, and submitting obediently to them. As we have seen, faith is the initial response required of a human heart to the gospel, and is the primary basis of one's acceptance by God. No one is going to be saved who doesn't believe. But in addition to faith, the Bible also teaches that repentance is a necessary condition of salvation.

Jesus said, “except you repent, you will all likewise perish,” Luke 13:3.

The Bible tells us that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his [Christ's] name unto all nations . . .” Luke 24:47.

The apostle Peter told believers who were inquiring what they must do to be saved, to “repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.” Acts 2:38.

And again, Peter preached, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.” Acts 3:19.

The apostle Paul declared that God now

commands "men that they should all everywhere repent." Acts 17:30.

Peter affirmed that God "is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Second Peter 3:9.

Repentance is a change of a person's mind, or will, prompted by remorse for having offended God by sinning against Him. Such a change of will results in a reformation of one's life. In other words, a person who has been enmeshed in sin, but who becomes a believer by hearing the gospel, then feels bad about sin in his life, decides to change direction, quit sinning, and start living for the Lord. That's repentance.

"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation . . ." Second Corinthians 7:10.

Even after a person becomes a Christian he must continue to have a penitent attitude because all of us continue to be sinful creatures through the weakness of the flesh. But for those in Christ, who have stopped pursuing sin, the blood of Christ cleanses from sin, as acknowledgement of sin is made before God and His forgiveness is sought.

To Christians, the apostle John wrote ". . . if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is

faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." First John 1:7-9.

There is a big difference in "pursuing" a sinful life style, as contrasted with inadvertently falling short of God's glory through human weakness, though trying to do right. The Bible teaches that a person who has come to believe in Christ as the Lord and Savior must repent of the "pursuit" of sin (or the sinful life style) in the process of becoming a Christian, and that after becoming one, continue to be penitent in the day to day mistakes and shortcomings that are a part of everyone's life.

Not only must a person believe and repent in the process of responding to the gospel, but a number of Scriptures teach us that it is the Lord's will that a penitent believer confess faith in Christ in the presence of others. This confession is an expression of one's implicit faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of the Living God, and in His being Lord. While done verbally in the process of obeying the primary commands of the gospel, it is something that should continue to be repeated in word and life throughout the earthly pilgrimage of everyone who becomes a Christian.

During His personal ministry, Jesus said, "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 10.32.

Obviously, the confession Jesus had in mind was

the same one Peter made of Him in expressing his conviction: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Matthew 16:16.

This is further evidenced by reading the story of the conversion of the treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Philip, the evangelist, preached the gospel of Jesus to the man, and he asked to be baptized. Philip told him he could if he believed "with all his heart." The man replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8:26-37.

The apostle Paul wrote, "if you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9-10.

And the apostle John wrote, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." First John 4:15.

When a person believes the gospel, repents of past sins, and confesses faith in Jesus Christ before others, that individual is then ready to enter Christ and thus, become a child of God. The New Testament teaches plainly that baptism is the culminating act of obedience that puts a penitent believer into Christ. By original definition, baptism is a burial. The Greek word "baptizo," transliterated (i.e., spelled in the letters of the alphabet of another language) into

English, "baptize," means to "dip, to plunge, to cover up, to bury, to immerse." All reputable Greek lexicons give this information. Baptism is immersion—it is a burial. And the Bible makes it very clear that the element in which penitent believers are to be immersed, or buried, is water.

Jesus was immersed by John in the water of the Jordan river. Read Matthew 3:13-17.

"And John was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there . . ." John 3:23.

Baptism then, is immersion in water. Baptism is not sprinkling, or pouring. If, dear reader, you have just been sprinkled with water, or have had some water poured over your head, you have not been Scripturally baptized. Bible baptism is immersion—a burial with Christ. This is a very important matter!

"In baptism, you were buried with him and raised with him through your faith in the power of God . . ." Colossians 2:12.

"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Romans 6:4.

The essential nature of baptism is evidenced in its identity as the "new birth." Jesus spoke of the new birth on one occasion, and set it forth as being necessary in order for a person to enter the kingdom.

The New Testament clarifies what Jesus meant by "being born again" in many corresponding Scriptures. The new birth is baptism into Christ for remission of sins.

Our Savior said, "Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." John 3:5. He used the expression, "born again," in verse 3.

In giving the great commission to His apostles, our Lord and Savior said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation; he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Mark 16:15-16.

Matthew quotes Jesus as saying: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matthew 28:18-20.

In the physical realm, we all know that there must be a begattal (i.e., conception) before there can be a birth. The same is true in the spiritual realm. One must first be begotten, and then born. When the gospel is received by faith in one's heart, the "spiritual conception" takes place.

In writing to Christians, James speaks of God,

saying "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth . . . in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." James 1:18, 21b.

Thus, the apostle Peter teaches Christians: "Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth . . . having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides forever." First Peter 1:22-23.

When the faith that has been produced in the human heart by the gospel expresses itself in obedience, that is the new birth process—the believer repents, confesses faith in Christ before others, and is then baptized (i.e., the act of being "born again") into Christ for the remission of sins. Birth, by definition, "is the act of coming into life." In the spiritual realm, life is in Christ. Therefore, the act that brings us into Christ is the "new birth."

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10.

"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." First John 5:11-12.

In writing to Christians Paul said, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed

yourselves with Christ." Galatians 3:27.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold, they have become new." Second Corinthians 5:17.

Baptism is the act that brings a penitent believer into Christ. It is the culmination of the birth process. A person is "begotten" by hearing and receiving the gospel message in faith. As faith "develops" (just as a physical embryo must develop before it is actually born), it expresses itself in repentance, and motivates the individual to confess belief in Jesus as God's Son before others. The individual thus reaches the point of being ready for birth. The spiritual birth is accomplished by being baptized—baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins—saved by God's grace; cleansed by the precious blood that Jesus shed in His death upon the cross. Thus, such an individual is "born again" of "water and the Spirit." Born of "water" is the very act of being immersed in water, to be raised to walk in "newness of life." Born of the "spirit" in complying with the instructions the Holy Spirit gave by inspiring the apostles, and guiding them into "all the truth," one facet of which was the instruction to be baptized.

"Jesus had told His apostles, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . ." John 16:13.

And what did the Spirit guide the apostles to teach?—"Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins

may be forgiven." Acts 2:38.

We see therefore, that the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into giving the conditions of pardon that correspond perfectly with what Jesus taught during His personal ministry—faith, repentance, confession, and baptism! And other first century evangelists, inspired by miraculous spiritual gifts through the laying on of the hands of the apostles, as Philip (Acts 6:5-6,8,10) were guided into the same understanding—

"And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ... when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Acts 8:5,12.

"And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, 'Behold, here is water; what prevents me from being baptized? And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' And he [i.e., Philip] commanded the chariot to stand still; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he [Philip] baptized him [the eunuch]." Acts 8:35-38.

The great apostle Paul himself, in recounting his conversion, related that after three days of fasting

and prayer in Damascus, that a gospel preacher by the name of Ananias came to him and said—

“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Acts 22:16.

It wasn't the water of baptism that washed away his sins—it was the precious blood of Christ. But the truth is this: the blood of Christ is appropriated when the penitent believer obeys the Lord's command to be baptized. Christ shed His blood in dying on the cross, and the Bible teaches that we are “baptized into his death!” Thus, we come in contact with His blood when we are baptized. The benefits of the atoning death of the Savior are received in baptism—past sins are washed away by His blood shed for us, and the sincere, penitent believer arises from the watery grave, redeemed and made whole. With this understanding, we can readily see that baptism is vital to our salvation. And thus, the apostles penned:

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into his death?” Romans 6:3.

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish, or defect.” First Peter 1:18-19.

“... baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a

good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." First Peter 3:21.

Baptism saves in the sense that it is a God-given command, and when a person obeys God's command to be baptized, with an understanding of, and appreciation for Jesus Christ, the Savior, and His atoning sacrifice, he then receives the benefits of that sacrifice, and is cleansed by Christ's blood and saved by God's grace.

The whole conversion process is easily seen in a careful study of Acts 2. Please open your Bible to that book and chapter, and begin reading with verse 22. You will learn that the sermon delivered on that occasion by the apostle Peter consisted of four essential truths:

- (1) Jesus Christ had been approved of God among men.
- (2) Jesus Christ had been crucified.
- (3) Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead.
- (4) Jesus Christ had been exalted, and made Lord by Almighty God.

Those four "points" are clearly seen by reading verses 22-36. Verse 37 indicates that a goodly number of those who heard this message (i.e., the gospel of Jesus Christ) believed it, and inquired, "What shall we do?" By inspiration, the apostle Peter then gave them the terms of pardon:

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be

forgiven." Verse 38.

The record then states: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousands were added to their number that day." Verse 41.

"And the Lord added to their number [i.e., the church] daily those who were being saved." Verse 47.

My friend, isn't that plain? Is there any reason for anyone to be confused? Obviously, the process by which they were saved from sin, was precisely the same way they became Christians. It was the way they became members of the Lord's church, and children of God. The Bible does not teach that persons are saved by one process, and then can go out and "join the church of their choice" by another process. The conversion process is plainly set forth in the New Testament Scriptures: the truth of the gospel was proclaimed; those who believed it inquired as to what they needed to do to be saved; they were told to repent and be baptized in order to obtain the remission of sins; those who did became Christians and were added to the Lord's church by Him. It is just that simple.

Let us, examine one more context to further substantiate what has already been set forth. Please turn in your Bible to the sixth chapter of the book of Romans. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians who lived in the city of Rome. Among other things he wrote, are these words:

“... thanks be to God, that though you were slaves of sin, [i.e. they had at one time been engulfed in sinful pursuits], you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching delivered unto you; and being made free from sin, you became servants of righteousness.” Romans 6:17-18.

Let me pose a question—what was the “form of teaching” delivered unto them? Answer—the gospel of Jesus Christ, the heart of which is the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. Please read Romans 1:16 and First Corinthians 15:1-4.

Now, consider another question—how could they obey that? Answer—they “crucified” their sinful selves in repentance, and buried their “old selves” (dead because of sin, but now also dead to the pursuit of sin) by baptism into the death of Christ, and were raised as new creatures, to walk in newness of life.

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin: how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may have a new life. If we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we also certainly shall be united with him in the likeness of his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no

longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives unto God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:1-11.

One last question—when were they freed from sin? When did they become servants of righteousness? Answer—when they obeyed the gospel; when they were baptized into Christ!

As already pointed out, baptism was that culminating act of obedience that put a penitent believer into Christ, wherein salvation became a reality. And what was true in New Testament times is still true today. People are saved today in exactly the same way!

In summary, the gospel is God's power to save; when a person hears it, and believes it, he then must obey it. Obedience involves repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the forgiveness of sins. In this process of obeying the gospel, culminated by baptism, a person becomes a Christian, "born again" of water and the Spirit into the family of God, and automatically thereby becomes a member of the Lord's church. This is just the beginning of the Christian life—a life of obedience to Christ, and service to Him! It is the happiest life in the world because a Christian is freed from the burden of sin and guilt! The Christian in joy serves a Living Savior who is Lord of lords and King of kings!

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” First Peter 1:8-9.

“Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice!” Philippians 4:4.

Therefore, my friend if you have never yet obeyed the gospel of Christ, I ask you the same question Ananias asked Paul in the long, long ago. . . .

“And now what are you waiting for? Arise, and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Acts 22:16.

THE LORD'S CHURCH

During His personal ministry, Jesus taught much concerning His kingdom, or church. I refer you to the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are accounts of His life and teachings. Among numerous things pertaining to His kingdom, He said—

“Upon this rock [i.e. the truth that He was indeed the Son of God] I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18.

Notice that the Lord did not say, "I will build a church." Neither did He say, "I will build many churches." Christ said, "I will build my church." He spoke of just one. He declared, "The gates of hades shall not prevail against it." The word, hades, means "the place of disembodied spirits; the unseen state of the dead." Thus, the expression, "gates of hades," refers to death—therefore, Jesus is saying that not even death shall prevail against His church! This church, or spiritual kingdom, which Christ taught repeatedly was of incomparable value, would be everlasting and indestructible. (Please read such Scriptures as Daniel 2:44 and Daniel 7:13-14 from the Old Testament, and Luke 1:32-33, Matthew 13:40-45, as well as Matthew 16:18 from the New Testament, which substantiate this truth.) It was of Divine origin, and Divine providence would protect it.

While Jesus yet lived on the earth, the church (i.e., Christ's kingdom) was spoken of as being in the future. It was not at that time established. But let us note the sequences of events which followed His death on the cross, and His subsequent resurrection from the dead—

- (1) He ascended back into heaven to the Father—
Read Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:1-11.
- (2) He was seated at God's right hand—Read Mark 16:19 and Hebrews 1:3.
- (3) God gave Him power, and rule, and authority—
Read Ephesians 1:19-21 and First Peter 3:22.
- (4) God gave Him to be the head of the church—
Read Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18.
- (5) Christ, then, established His church through the preaching of the apostles—Read all of Acts 2.

The church of Christ came into existence on the Jewish feast day, called Pentecost, following the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus. The place was the city of Jerusalem. The year was 33 A.D.—this date being in accord with the generally accepted calendar. Prior to the second chapter of the book of Acts, the church was spoken of as being in the future. But in Acts 2 the record clearly indicates it came into existence. And from that point in the Bible (Acts 2), through the remaining portions of the new Testament, the church is spoken of as being in existence. Therefore, we know precisely when and where the church of our Lord was established—33 A.D. in Jerusalem. With all this in mind, let us now note some other very important things about Christ's church:

- (1) Christ loved the church and died for it purchasing it with His own precious blood: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it." Ephesians 5:25. Concerning the church, Paul said, "...which he purchased with his own blood." Acts 20:28.
- (2) The church is Christ's spiritual body—Please read First Corinthians 12:12-27, and Ephesians 1:22-23.
—There is one body. Read Ephesians 4:4. Since the body is the church, and there is only one body, then it is elementary to conclude that there is only one true church.
- (3) The church belongs to Christ—He purchased it, He built it, and God gave Him to be the head of it.

- (4) The church is the body of the saved: the body of the redeemed. It is Christ's "ekklesia" (i.e., the "called out" of Christ).
- (5) The church is a spiritual "house," wherein each Christian is a living stone. Read Ephesians 2:21-22 and First Peter 2:5.
- (6) The church is the body of the reconciled to God! Read Ephesians 2:13-16.
- (7) The church is a divine institution. It is neither Catholic nor Protestant—it is not a human produced denomination or sect. The Lord's church was conceived in the mind of God from time eternal, and His wisdom is clearly evidenced in it. Read Ephesians 3:8-11.

Religious division is wrong! The very concept of denominationalism is contrary to what Christ prayed for, and opposite to what His will teaches.

Jesus prayed for those who would believe on Him through the preaching of the apostles, "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." John 17:21.

In writing to the church in Corinth, which was beginning to show signs of division, the apostle Paul wrote, "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." First Corinthians 1:10.

The Bible teaches that God is not the author of confusion—read First Corinthians 14:33. But the division within so-called “Christendom” is indeed confusing. Multitudes of people don't have any idea “what to believe?” There are so many conflicting doctrines, and differing theologies, and so many denominational churches wearing all kinds of names, and worshipping in different ways, that the average person is hopelessly confused. You can be assured, my friend, that God is not the author of such!

Denominationalism is the antithesis of the unity the Bible teaches. Reflect carefully and thoughtfully on the following quotation from Ephesians 4:3-6.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body, and one spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

The cause for religious division and confusion is the failure to recognize, and submit to the authority of Christ! Too many people want to have their own way about things, instead of being humbly obedient to the will of Christ. It is not enough to just say, “Jesus is Lord.” We must do what the Lord said for us to do!

Jesus inquired, “Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” Luke 6:46.

The church of Christ today, as in New Testament times, recognizes the headship of Jesus, and submits to His authority.

Jesus said, "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth . . ." Matthew 28:18.

Therefore, no council, or synod, can formulate doctrines or legislate rules for the Lord's church. The church of Christ yields only to the authority of its Head. It accepts no man-made creed books—no Catechisms, no Manuals, no Disciplines, or Confessions of Faith—it accepts only the word of the Lord. "We speak where the Bible speaks, and are silent where the Bible is silent." We are of the conviction that the Bible only will produce Christians only!

The church of Christ is structured exactly as revealed in the New Testament, in local congregational organization, and worship. Likewise, in doctrine and practice. There is no central organization—each congregation is autonomous under the headship of Christ. The worship is simple—singing without mechanical instruments of music, the observance of the Lord's supper each Sunday as a memorial of Christ and His sacrificial death for us, prayer to the Father in the name of Christ, the proclamation and teaching of the Bible, and the free-will giving of its members to support the work of the church.

All of this is in keeping with the recognition of the Lord's authority, and the acceptance of the New Testament Scriptures as His last will and testament for us.

Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:24.

To do otherwise is to worship God to no avail, because, Jesus, in condemning the false religionists of His day, plainly stated: "They worship me in vain: their teachings are but rules made by man." Matthew 15:9.

YOU CAN BE A CHRISTIAN ONLY

As has been clearly demonstrated from the Scriptures, when people heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, they were saved from past sins and automatically became Christians, being added to the church by the Lord. They became nothing more than, and nothing less than, Christians. The process by which they were saved was exactly the same way they became Christians, and members of the church of Christ. Such individuals did not become some kind of "brand-name" Christians, but Christians only. They didn't belong to any man-made church, either Catholic or Protestant.

"The disciples were called Christians..." Acts 11:26.

"If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name." First Peter 4:16.

My friend, you can be just a Christian also, if you will believe the truth, and obey the gospel commands to repent, confess faith in Christ, and be baptized.

When you do this in humble sincerity, the Lord will add you to His church, and you will be a Christian! No one "votes" on you. You don't subscribe to some man-made creed. You don't join any denomination. You simply become a Christian by believing, and obeying the gospel. You become a member of His church—the church of Christ.

As a Christian, you will want to, and you will need to worship regularly with the church of Christ in your community. You will generally find the members thereof to be the very finest kind of people. You may discover some few hypocrites (unfortunately, hypocrites can be found most anywhere, including the church, but such will be lost eternally if they don't change!) among them, and surely some human imperfections, but you will also come to know those who are indeed "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world," just as Jesus said His true followers would be (Matthew 5:13-16). And your association with these—the preciousness of fellowship with kindred minds and hearts—will be the most rewarding experience of your life! These, as your brothers and sisters in the family of God, will help you and encourage you to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings—

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Hebrews 10:23-25.

“Therefore, encourage one another, and build each other up . . .” First Thessalonians 5:11.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” First Corinthians 15:58.

Jesus said, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Revelation 2:10b.

Peter assured Christians, that if they would abound in the Christian graces, that “thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Second Peter 1-5:11.

The blessings of being a Christian are great and wonderful! The happiness, and peace of mind in knowing that one's relationship with God is what it should be is of inestimable value!

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7.

The Christian life is the most meaningful life a person can possibly live. It brings contentment and fulfilment, deep inward satisfaction, and hope. So many people are searching in vain for these because they are looking for them in the wrong places! They are not to be found in fame, fortune, or physical pleasures. Neither the “thrills and frills, nor the “glamour and glitter” of this world can satisfy the

yearnings of the human soul! "Drinking" and drugs bring only ruination and despair! Revelling and carousing afford but momentary excitement, which soon fades away, leaving nothing of lasting value. Sexual gratification obtained in adultery, fornication, or homosexual perversion, is but fleeting, and takes a devastating toll in degrading one's self-respect and in scarring one's conscience. All of these things are sinful and wrong, and counter-productive to one's spiritual well-being. This wicked "world" cannot fulfil the longings of a person's spiritual being. No wonder then the apostle John wrote the following words—

"Love not the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the one that does the will of God abides forever."
First John 2:15-17.

Truly, the Christian life is the abundant life! It gives one peace joy, and hope that transcends this earth-life.

Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." John 10:10.

The abundant life, my friend, is in Christ Jesus! That, I can guarantee you! Christians are greatly blessed on earth, and have the precious promise from God of eternal life in the heavenly city of bliss and happiness forevermore!

The following words of Jesus are significantly comforting: "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, along with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life." Mark 10:29-30.

My ardent prayer is that God will bless this message from my heart to yours, in your conversion to Christ, His truth, and His way. I love you and I want you to be saved eternally. And much more important, the Lord loves you and wants you to be saved. But you must believe and obey the truth, and live for Him. I have tried to communicate the truth to you as clearly as possible. What you do about it is up to you. But please, I beg of you, in view of a never ending eternity to come, accept it. Only the truth can make you free. As Jesus declared,

"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32.

It is with these most sincere sentiments that this message has been given to you. I close with the words of the apostle Paul in ascribing honor to God—

"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:21.

THE GREATEST CAUSE

Men have given of themselves in the furtherance of various causes throughout the history of the world. It has not been uncommon for people to make tremendous sacrifices, even to the giving of their lives, to advance or defend something in which they believed. There is one cause that shades into complete insignificance all other causes combined, no matter how noble the others might be. It is the one cause for which a man would be very wise indeed to uncompromisingly give his all! While the other causes may be fine and deserving of support, the cause of Christ is **THE GREATEST**, and is deserving of our all!

It is very difficult for me to understand people being fanatic in supporting the erroneous "isms" that are plaguing the world today. . . causes which create chaos and champion suppression and tyranny. How could people be so misled, and so foolishly augment systems that result in so much human misery and suffering? But it is even more difficult for me to understand the indifference and apathy which pervades the ranks of those who are supposed to be carrying the banner of Christ! The cause of truth and righteousness which brings salvation, peace and joy is often nearly deserted by its professors, while the misguided adherents of the isms of darkness demonstrate unwavering dedication! *My brethren, this ought not to be!* My earnest prayer is that all soldiers of Christ will arise out of complacency NOW, put on the armor of God and show to this world that the cause of Jesus Christ is the greatest cause and mankind's only hope!! May God grant that this be

true of each of us while mercy lingers and opportunities remain!

“CARELESS SOUL O HEED THE WARNING”

A man by the name of J.H. Stanley wrote the song, *Prepare To Meet Thy God*. The words of the chorus pleadingly state: “Careless soul, O heed the warning, for your life will soon be gone; O how sad to face the judgment, unprepared to meet thy God.” The Bible emphatically teaches impending judgment: Acts 17:31, Romans 14:10b-12, Matthew 25:31-46, Hebrews 9:27, II Corinthians 5:10, and throughout the book of Revelation. And yet so many people are so careless about their souls! Better heed the warnings, my friend!

DOING GOOD

Each one of us should do all the good he can, while he can, where he can, and when he can!

Jesus “went about doing good.” Acts 10:38. He left us an “example, that (we) should follow in his steps,” I Peter 2:21.

What is needed in the church as much as anything I know is compassion, and merciful hearts! And it has been my observation that we have far too little of it!

The Bible declares, “Withhold not good from

them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." Proverbs 3:27. "And let us not be weary in well-doing. . .as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith." Galatians 6:9-10. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." James 4:17.

We would do well to carefully consider the basis of the judgment as delineated by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46. Of all the things Christ could have listed as criteria for the final separation, He chose "*doing good*" as opposed to "*NOT*" doing good."

Individual Christians should have an earned reputation for being kind, and generous in helping others! And what is true of the individual, should be true of the church as a whole! I would to God that the Lord's church everywhere had a deserved name for "having a heart as big as all outdoors!"

Read Colossians 3:12-14, and let us resolve that the church, individually and collectively, will be busy *doing good!*

HE DEPARTED WITH NO ONE'S REGRET

When Jehoram, the fifth king of Judah, died, the Bible tells us "*he departed with no one's regret.*" II Chronicles 21:20, RSV. Isn't that sad? Here was a man who reigned as king for eight years and endeared himself to no one. The reason was that he was an evil man and walked not in the ways of God!

In contrast, consider a woman of Joppa who lived centuries later, by the name of Dorcas. She didn't exercise any rule or wield any authority as did Jehoram, but she lived right and busied herself in good works. Therefore at her demise, there was much weeping. Acts 9:39. Folks regretted her departure.

How about you, my friend? How will people feel about it when you die? Will grateful hearts recall your genuine character and significant accomplishments for that which is good and right? Or will you "*depart with no one's regret*" because of the kind of life you chose to live? **THINK ABOUT IT!**

THE SWORD, THE FLAME, THE BEASTS!!

It's impossible for us to realize what *real persecution* is like. For the simple reason we've never experienced it. We just can't imagine how terrifying and horrible such a thing must be.

Countless *others have known*, however. Thousands of Christians died during the ten successive persecutions under the pagan Roman empire. Christians were given the choice to deny Christ and say "Caesar is Lord" or suffer the agonizing consequences. The sword, the flame, and the beasts took a devastating toll! Thank God for those who gave the Lord Jesus the full measure of glory they had to offer Him by remaining faithful even "unto death!" Of such the world was not worthy!

In about 65 A. D., the apostle Peter warned those early Christians what they were facing . . . "Beloved,

think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you: but insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory also ye may rejoice with exceeding joy." I Peter 4:12-13. This in essence is the same thing Jesus had told His disciples during His personal ministry. Read again Matthew 5:1-12.

But it is one thing to exhort folks to bear up under persecution when it comes, and quite another thing for them to actually experience the terror of it!

I believe very strongly that this is the main reason God gave to the apostle John the visions that comprise the book called *Revelation*—to comfort Christians who were then actually enduring the sword, the flame, and the beasts with the knowledge that the Heavenly Father cared, and would be with them! And that the ultimate victory was theirs in Jesus Christ the Lord!

There is much we may not be able to fully comprehend about the book of *Revelation*, but it seems to "come through loud and clear" that God is Supreme, and though evil forces may appear to be winning, they will be finally and totally defeated, and that which is right, and good, and true will triumph eternally! God is with His people through their trials on this earth and will most assuredly bring His wrath upon those who persecute them. And God will bring home to Himself His faithful ones into the beautiful, holy, and celestial city of heaven!

Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory—over whatever we must face in this life; even the sword, the flame, the beasts!

"I WANT TO"

Most folks do what they want to do. If a person's desire to do something is strong enough, he'll somehow get it done. Motivation is the key. This is true in all realms of human endeavor. It's true in education, in business, in athletics, in recreation, in hobbies, or whatever.

And it is certainly true in every facet of living the Christian's life. If a person *really* loves the Lord, the church, and the truth, he will do what the New Testament teaches he should do. Jesus said, "*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*" John 14:15. There won't be any bickering about it, no balking, and no effort to circumvent the plain teaching of the Savior. The *true* Christian will worship, work, and serve, because that is what he **WANTS** to do!

One of the worst mistakes we make in the church is to deal with symptoms instead of the cause, with externals instead of the internal. We who preach, "rake brethren over the coals" for their sporadic attendance, lack of interest, and non-involvement—in our frustration we see these obvious manifestations of spiritual-deficiencies, and thus, we strike directly at them. But the real "culprit" is what is missing in the hearts of the lukewarm—the "I want to" factor! To repeat, motivation is the key!

But how is one motivated to "want to?" The answer begins with Matthew 22:37-38 . . . "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment." When the "affections" in our

hearts are "sorted-out" as to priorities, then so shall it be in our lives! This is exactly what the apostle Paul meant in Colossians 3:2, where he wrote, "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth." Once this is a reality within our hearts, then, and only then will we be able to say, "For to me to live is Christ," Philippians 1:21. Paul could express such a sentiment, and what he further states in Philippians 3:7-9a, because his heart was right with the Lord, his affections were centered on Him, and his priorities were straight! Therefore, he served the Lord with everything he had! And he did it because he "wanted to!"

Dear brother or sister in Christ, if you feel yourself "slipping" spiritually, will you not think prayerfully on this little article? And learn to say from the deep recesses of your heart, "I WANT TO" be a worker for my Lord!

FAR OFF FOLLOWERS

When Jesus was being taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, on the night of His betrayal, the Bible tells us that Peter "*followed him afar off.*" Matthew 26:58.

In like manner today, too many members of the church are following our Lord from "afar off." In fact, some are following from so far off that it is scarcely discernible that they are following Him at all! What a tragedy!

What is needed among members of the church is decisiveness! Each of us needs to decide once and for

all, "I am going to follow Jesus—come what may! I am not going to follow Him from afar, but closely. I will never turn my back from His way."

Only in being "close-to" followers, can we know and possess the inward satisfaction and peace of mind that passeth all understanding.

"AM I BECOME YOUR ENEMY BECAUSE I TELL YOU THE TRUTH?"

The apostle Paul once asked the question of the Galatians, "Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" Galatians 4:16. Paul didn't desire to be their enemy; in fact, he wanted to be their friend, and *was indeed* their friend. But the only way he could lay valid claim on being their friend was to tell them the truth. If he had told them anything other than the truth, more than the truth, or less than the truth, then he would have been their enemy.

Whenever members of the Lord's church stand up for definitive truth, and against error, they can expect opposition and resentment. Read through the book of Acts and see what happened in Paul's case. Everywhere he went he stirred people up! As a result, hostilities were manifested. Read Acts 13:50; 14:19; 16:19ff; 17:32a; 19:23ff; 21:27ff; 22:22ff; 23:7-10; 12ff; and 26:24. Read also II Corinthians 11:24-28.

But brethren, we just as well admit it—*We're not stirring many people up in this day and time!* And the reason why is because we are not aggressively preaching and teaching the truth, and contrasting it with error, as we should be doing. When we do, we

will once again cause a "stir," and that's when the cause of Christ flourishes. It is not a matter of being "mean or ugly" in our presentation of truth. That is uncalled for and wrong. But even when we present "truth in love," if we're plain and bold enough, it will stir people up.

When threatened, the apostles prayed to God for courage to preach God's word "with all boldness." Acts 4:29. And that is precisely what the church needs to be doing today—preaching the word of God with all boldness! We need to tell it like it is, fervently, incisively, explicitly, yet in kindness and love. We dare not do less! Let the chips fall as they may.

DOGS SELDOM BARK AT TOMBSTONES

Some dogs bark just to be barking. They may have no idea why they're barking, and they don't really have anything to bark at, but they bark anyway. Barking just seems to be "second nature" with these. Yet most generally, when everything is still, silence prevails among the canine corps. *Dogs seldom bark at tombstones!* But let someone jog down the roadway, and every dog in the whole country will start barking! They do love to bark at anything or anybody that is moving!

I see a parallel in the church. A few in most every congregation are so hyper-critical by nature that they'll complain and gripe even if there is really nothing stirring. Seldom, however, do they attack the members that are about as "dead as doornails."

There's just not much excitement in "barking at tombstones!" But let someone start *doing something* that is progressive and constructive, and listen to the hyper-critical corps come alive!

So the moral to all this is—if you don't want to get "barked at" then do nothing at all. Be as still as a tombstone, and most likely, the barkers will be silent. But if, of course, you are a *doer of the word* and not a hearer only (as James 1:22 teaches us to be), then don't be surprised when "barking pierces the air!"

Really though, the true Christian doesn't have any choice—the Bible says "Be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" I Corinthians 15:58. Let the hypercritics bark as they may, the Lord's work must be done!

HAPPINESS IN TRIALS

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds." James 1:2. (New International Version) On the surface of it, this statement is paradoxical. How can one be joyous in the midst of trials? Joy is usually associated with very pleasing and advantageous situations. Anguish and misery are the generally accepted attitudes reserved for trials and tribulations.

On what basis then, did the Holy Spirit guide James in making such a statement? Obviously, the key is in the context itself. Verse 3 informs us that the proving, or testing of one's faith develops steadfastness or perseverance. And perseverance is that which produces maturity and completeness

within one. Fidelity to the Lord all the way through life is so very important. Jesus said, "*he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved.*" Matthew 24:13. And there is the real "key" to this passage—

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the victor's crown, the life God has promised to those who love him." James 1:12 (NIV) This, my brethren, is the ultimate goal of the Christian! The crown of life! The heavenly inheritance!

So many Scriptures point the faithful Christian to the eternal victory. Consider just a few: Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you . . . I (will) come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:2-3. The apostle Paul wrote, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more an eternal weight of glory . . . for we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle (i.e., our body) be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." II Corinthians 4:17; 5:1. This same great apostle speaks of himself as being "in hope of eternal life," (Titus 1:2) and in happy anticipation of receiving "the crown of righteousness." II Timothy 4:8. Christ promised "the crown of life" to those Christians who would be faithful even unto death. Revelation 2:10. And the apostle Peter expressed praise to God for the "inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away," which is reserved in heaven! I Peter 1:3-4.

In view of all this, Paul declared, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed

to us-ward." Romans 8:18. No wonder James told Christians to be happy in trials!

PREACHING THE KINGDOM

Just a very few years ago it was a rather popular thing among some to say, "Let's just preach Christ, but not the church." Thankfully, that inane "tell-tale" slogan of liberal philosophy is not heard very much anymore. And hopefully, it won't be again. The whole premise was fallacious. Christ and His church are inseparable. One can't be preached, completely, without the other being preached. They go together.

Notice Acts 8:12—"But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God (i.e., the church) and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Later on in Acts, Luke records that Paul resided for two years in his own hired dwelling in Rome, receiving all those who came to see him, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness . . ." 28:31.

Philip and Paul (both men were enabled by the Holy Spirit to do great signs, and undoubtedly guided by Him, in the message they proclaimed—see Acts 6:5-6, 8-10; 8:5-7, 13; Galatians 1:11-12; I Corinthians 2:10, 13, etc.) each preached Christ and the kingdom of God.

Even a casual reading of the New Testament would convince anyone that Jesus Christ is The Savior and redeemer! (See such Scriptures as Acts 2:36; 4:10-12; 13:23, 38; Romans 3:24-25; I Timothy

1:15; etc.) And it is equally plain that the saved are added to the church, "translated" into the kingdom, which has been purchased by Christ's blood! (Read Colossians 1:13-14).

To be in Christ is to be in His Church, which is the kingdom. (Read Luke 1:32-33; Matthew 16:18-19; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Ephesians 2:19-22). The church is the "house" (i.e., the family) of God. (see I Timothy 3:15), and all of God's children are in His family. And He gave them the name, "Christian." (Read Isaiah 62:2; Acts 11:26; and I Peter 4:16).

Let us always preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified (I Corinthians 1:18; 2:1-2; 15:1-3) as the very "heart" of our message, but let us also teach people the truth concerning the kingdom and what is necessary in order to become citizens thereof.

THE HEAVENLY CITY

It is my conviction that Revelation 21 and the first five verses of chapter 22 is a description of the glorified state of the church in the eternal realm to come. The picture is of the "new Jerusalem," that holy city (i.e., the church) "made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." The setting is that of the "marriage feast" of the Lamb and His bride. It is a scene of celestial bliss and glory beyond compare of the redeemed in eternity. Thus, in symbolic language, it is God's way of conveying to our minds how beautiful and wonderful *heaven* is going to be!

Using the most precious things with which human beings are familiar, God describes the

heavenly city. It is the most fantastic sight ever seen! It defies the imagination! It far excels anything we've ever experienced! Dazzling beauty of great magnitude! Perfected joy, bliss, and happiness, totally free from the former pains, sufferings, sorrows and death that plagued the ransomed on earth.

To God be the glory and praise for the magnificent salvation he has freely given us in Christ, and for the heavenly city He has prepared for the faithful!

"THE DUE ORDER"

Most Bible readers remember the incident involving Uzzah and the ark of the covenant. Because Uzzah put his hand to the ark, God struck him dead, II Samuel 6:6-7. On the surface, this appears to be very stern punishment for what seemed a well intentioned gesture, but it takes on special significance with a little research.

We learn that the tribe of Levi was to carry the ark, Deuteronomy 10:8. More precisely, the family of Kohath of the Levites, Numbers 3:30-31. They were to carry the ark only after the sons of Aaron had properly covered it, and God cautioned them not to touch the ark, warning of death to any who did, Numbers 4:15. The ark was to be carried by staves in the rings on both sides of the ark, Exodus 25:14-15.

Reading the contexts of II Samuel 6:1-7 and I Chronicles 15:1-15, we find that not only had David and his men transported the ark in a manner other than the appointed way, but by persons other than those God had designated. They placed the ark on a

new cart, instead of carrying it by the staves, and persons other than the Levites were transporting it. They had ignored God's due order! They thought God's ordinance was unnecessary.

After the initial shock of God's decisive judgment had subsided, and David took time to reflect on the matter, he said, "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God . . ." I Chronicles 15:2. In verse 13, David gave explanation of God's anger upon them by saying, "*we sought him not after the due order.*" Complete attention was then given to doing God's will and verse 15 tells us that afterward, "the Levites bore the ark of God upon their shoulder with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to *the word of the Lord.*"

Everything went fine when they decided to do what God had told them to do in the first place. And so it is today. "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it," Luke 11:28. But people get into serious trouble when they take God's word lightly. No man has the right to supplant God's directives with his own opinions or desires! To do so is to be headed for trouble!

The plea we make to do things God's way is not out-moded! It is still the right way! We must seek God after "the due order," and people need to be warned that to do otherwise is to act in vain, Matthew 7:21 and Matthew 15:9. We please God by obeying Him!

Brethren, we must never allow truth to be sacrificed on the altar of compromise for any reason. We cannot afford to forget that there is a "due order," revealed to us on the pages of God's book. It must not

be taken lightly. It cost Uzzah his life, but it could cost us our souls! "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures, we might have hope." Romans 15:4.

"YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD"

Hundreds of sermons have been preached, and dozens of articles written on the importance of proper influence. Every Christian surely knows that "setting a good example" before the people of the world is of vital consequence! There is no reason not to know—the Bible is plain on the matter.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." Matthew 5:14. The apostle Paul urged Christians to be "blameless and pure, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe, holding forth the word of life" Philippians 2:15-16, ASV & NIV combined. And the apostle Peter wrote, ". . . you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light . . . Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of wrong doing, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." I Peter 2:9, 12, combination of ASV & NIV.

Yet, in spite of what God's word teaches, and in spite of all the sermons and articles admonishing Christians to shine forth brightly as exemplary lights

in a world of darkness, still some are so very careless about their conduct, and participate in things which are out of harmony with the singular direction in which our lives should always be headed!

It is true that none of us are perfect. And it is also true that very few, if any, of us are totally consistent. *But the important thing is that we should at least ALWAYS BE TRYING TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT! and that we should be keenly cognizant of our responsibility in setting the right example and in being the right kind of influence!*

WHAT WILL BUILD A STRONG CHURCH?

Not sensationalism! Not gimmicks! Nor more committees, or mere programs, or a "fun and games" emphasis! These things may be "right-on" for civic clubs, social clubs, and country clubs, but not for the Lord's church!

What does it take to build a strong church? I believe with all my heart that the following things are essential!

1. *Strong Bible preaching and teaching!* God's word, when it is disseminated plainly, forcefully, uncompromisingly, and yet kindly, will **BUILD UP!** Paul said, "I commend you unto God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up . . ." Acts 20:32.
2. *Exemplary leadership!* Men who make themselves "examples to the flock," and who are

careful in tending it. I Peter 5:2-3. To grow, the church must have quality leadership—men who know how to lead and will do so!

3. *Christian living on the part of every member!* Unimpeachable conduct clearly evidenced in the lives of Christians will illuminate the way for many in the realm of darkness. Read Matthew 5:16 and Philippians 2:15.
4. *Congregational warmth and love!* The fellowship of the Lord's church should be so sweet and precious that the whole community takes notice, and observes, "See how they love each other!" Without this a congregation will never be what God would have it be!
5. *Compassionate hearts!* The church of Christ needs to be known as the most tender-hearted bunch of people in all the world . . . ready and willing to help all, and especially those of the household of faith. Galatians 6:9-10.
6. *Evangelistic fervor!* The emphasis of the early church was soul-winning! The church will grow when we cease not to "teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ" every day, wherever we have opportunity! Read Acts 5:42.
7. *An "I want to serve" attitude permeating the congregation!* People serving the Lord because they love Him, and they want to serve, and not out of a spirit of drudgery.
8. *An atmosphere of happiness, friendliness, cordiality, and hospitality!* No stranger should ever come into the midst of the Lord's church without being graciously greeted and welcomed by a happy, friendly membership! We must reach out to others, and not just "visit" with friends only.

It is my conviction that these eight ingredients will build a strong church! I pray fervently that all eight will become a reality of the Lord's people, more than ever before!

THERE IS POWER IN THE WORD OF GOD

As God is powerful, so also is His word! He "spoke" the heavens and the earth into existence! Psalms 33:6,9, and Genesis 1. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God . . ." Hebrews 11:3.

Talk about power! Think of the vastness and immensity of all we know to exist . . . and then think of a Being so mighty and wise as to "speak" such into existence. Believe me, friend, there is power in the word of God!

The same Source that empowered the spoken word, in like manner supplies the power of the written word! The written word of God is equally powerful in accomplishing what God intended for it, as was His spoken word in creation!

"For the word of God is living and powerful . . ." Hebrews 4:12. The apostle Paul affirmed that "*the gospel is the power of God*" to save those that believe. Romans 1:16. No wonder then that *the Lord gave emphasis to the preaching of the word*. See Mark 16:15-16, I Corinthians 1:21-23, and Romans 10:9-17.

But regretfully, many Christians seem to have lost confidence in the power of His word. They don't

seem to think it can accomplish what God has said it can. And thus, they are somewhat timid and hesitant about proclaiming it.

Brethren, God has said "my word . . . shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please . . ." Isaiah 55:11. We need to believe that, never doubting!

There have always been some who will listen (See Acts 2:41 and Acts 17:11 as examples), and there are people today who will also! Our task is to seek out the receptive ones and "preach the word" (II Timothy 4:2) to them earnestly and with a sense of urgency!

DON'T LET SATAN 'SIFT' YOU

The devil was desirous of "sifting" Peter like wheat, but the Lord intervened. See Luke 22:31. What Satan wanted to do with Peter he wants to do with you! He indeed is the avowed enemy of each of us! He is out to destroy us if he can . . . he is intent on the eternal ruination of our souls! As a roaring lion he walks about, seeking whom he may devour." I Peter 5:8. We must take heed, and be on guard!

Let's not allow Satan to triumph over us!

WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

By definition, the universe is "the whole body of things; the entire cosmos—the totality of the observed or postulated physical world." We all know that it

exists, and yet the magnitude and complexities of it transcend our mental capabilities. Our minds probe for the "explanation" of its existence. How did it come to be? Where did it come from?

Atheism has advanced varying theories and hypotheses in attempting to answer. All of these are based on a materialistic philosophy entirely, and "rule out" any possibility of a supernatural causative factor. It believes that somehow, someday, at sometime, differing elements and materials (the existence of which it cannot account for) acted together by blind chance to produce the orderly universe and life itself. Nothing could be more illogical.

On the other hand, faith in an all powerful and wise God, whose creative genius brought everything into being, is ten thousand times more plausible and reasonable. Thus, the Biblical account, which states, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," (Genesis 1:1) is indeed creditable.

True, the whole spectrum of thought relating to the universe and its origin is so profound as to be overwhelming to our finite minds. And numerous questions that emerge must go unanswered. But just think of the unanswered questions from the atheistic viewpoint.

Where did it all come from? The answer must be—God!

"I THIRST"

Pierced through with pain unimaginable, agoniz-

ing on the cross, our precious Savior said, "I thirst." John 19:28. But the terrible cruelty of that dreadful moment was evidenced in the fact that nothing was given Him to quench that thirst.

Have you ever been thirsty? I mean *really* thirsty! There is no other feeling quite like it. When prolonged and intensified, a person would give most anything for a cool glass of water.

But even if one's thirst is momentarily satisfied, there will come another time, and another, and yet another, when the same need is there. Physical thirst must be satisfied again and again! And thus, Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria, "Everyone that drinks of this water shall thirst again." John 4:13.

In the same context of Scripture, Jesus also refers to a "thirst" other than physical . . . a spiritual thirst. He informed the woman, and us too, that He can supply the "water" indeed to quench such a thirst . . . perpetually refreshing "water springing up unto eternal life." John 4:14. He suffered the physical thirst of the cross in order to supply the "water" for our spiritual thirst. In view of this, Jesus taught, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.

Are you hungering for righteousness, my friend? Is your soul thirsting for something more than what this world can afford? Jēsus Christ is the answer to your needs! Our Lord invites one and all: ". . . he that is athirst, let him come; whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17.

STOP AND THINK!!!

Most people have never given much thought as to their religious affiliation. They are what they are religiously mainly because that's what they were raised to be. Never bothering to question the validity of their beliefs and practices, they "pass-on" the traditional heritage in which they've been reared to their children. And the cycle continues.

How great it would be if folks would just *stop and think*, and *consider*: "Why am I what I am religiously? Is it because I've simply inherited it? Is it for business or social reasons? Is it because of convenience? Or is it because *it is the way revealed to us in the Bible?*

Beloved, the eternal destiny of precious souls is at stake! It is far too consequential a matter to take lightly. I am begging all who might chance to read this very brief article, to please *stop and think*. The welfare of your soul should be of an extremely urgent concern to you!! *Don't procrastinate, but beginning right now, delve into the Scriptures in a sincere and earnest quest for the TRUTH alone!*

Coming to know *the truth, believing it, obeying it, and living by it*, then you can speak to God as the Psalmist of old did, and say, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory." Psalms 73:24.

THE NEED FOR GOSPEL PREACHING NEVER CHANGES!

There is power in the preaching of God's word!

The power is in the message. Preachers are but "earthen vessels" through which the gospel is made known to others. Note the following Scriptures: "The preaching on the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God". I Corinthians 1:18. Paul's emphasis is on the message, not the messenger. It is the gospel which is God's power to save! Romans 1:16 and I Corinthians 15:1-2. Knowing that the power was in Christ and the message pertaining to Him, Paul said, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." II Corinthians 4:5. Thus, the admonition to Timothy . . . "preach the word!" II Timothy 4:2.

Yet this is not to say that the messenger is totally unimportant. Such is not the case. For the message to be disseminated, there must be those who love the Lord and His cause enough to do the work. While all of us readily acknowledge that "the message" is by far the *main thing*, would we not, in all objectivity, have to concede that there is at least some importance to be attached to the quality of the messenger? Obviously, the evangelist who is knowledgeable, dedicated to Christ, and committed to truth, is going to be more effective than one who knows little, cares little, and gives of himself but little.

We joyously exalt the One who is the heart of the message. . . *Jesus Christ!* To Him belongs the honor, the glory, and the preeminence. He is Lord and Savior! But "how then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Romans 10:13-14.

SIN—"HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO KILL"

Having always been fascinated by snakes, you can imagine my excitement on two occasions in visiting the world famous Miami serpentarium. Bill Haast, the renowned herpetologist who owned and operated it, must surely be the expert of experts on the subject of deadly serpents.

Conversing with him at some length, I inquired, "Which reptile do you consider to be the deadliest of all? Would it be the king cobra, the krait, the gaboon viper, the bushmaster, or the Australian tiger snake?" His reply to me was this—"That's like asking which gun is the most lethal at close range? Would it be the 12 gauge shotgun, the .357 magnum pistol, or the 30-06 rifle? *They all have what it takes to kill.*"

We could make similar inquiry as to sin. Which is the deadliest? Would it be murder, idolatry, adultery, stealing, drunkenness, cursing, or just what? The answer of course, should be rather obvious—*they all have what it takes to kill.*

The Scriptures declare, "each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the *sin*, when it is full-grown, *bringeth forth death.*" James 1:14-15. The apostle Paul wrote, "*the wages of sin is death.*" Romans 6:23.

With all this in mind, allow to me to ask a question. Why is it considered folly for a person to "play around" with a deadly snake, or with a loaded gun, and yet smart to "play around" with sin? The first two can bring death to the body, and the latter

can bring death to the soul.

Be it known to all that God has warned—*SIN HAS WHAT IT TAKES TO KILL!* Therefore, let us “abstain from every form of evil.” I Thessalonians 5:22. Shun the wrong, and do the right!

RECLAIMING THE STRAYS

It is nothing less than a terrible tragedy that so many members of the church have gone astray—as sheep that have wandered away from the fold. Most every community of any size at all has scores of “former-members” who seldom if ever “darken the door” of the church building. How sad!

Far too often, folks can stray away from the church with scarcely any notice or concern. After a year or so, someone might inquire, “I wonder what has happened to John and Mary Doe; I never see them in Bible study class or worship any more?”

And tragically, little organized effort is expended to reclaim those who have gone astray. A very few might attempt to contact the delinquents and lead them back to the fold, but generally speaking, not nearly enough is done. And the straying sheep go farther and farther away with the passing of time.

The Bible declares: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of gentleness, considering, thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:1-2.

I am urging the church everywhere to put forth an *all-out effort* to reclaim the strays. Let each of us assume the responsibility of going to see those who somehow have "drifted away" and *urge* them to "come home" to the Lord! Let's pray earnestly for them, and *work* at reclaiming them. Just think of the joyful scenes, as in the case of the prodigal son (Luke 15; 17-24), that would become reality throughout the brotherhood.

SEEKING THE LOST

Nothing in all this world is more important than soul-saving! *If the church were just convinced of this*, we not only *could*, but we *would* literally saturate this world with the message of salvation!

Jesus came to earth to "seek and to save" the lost. Luke 19: 10. Brethren, don't we realize that Jesus *knew what was really important*? And remember, He left us an example, that we should follow in His steps. I Peter 2:21.

But what are most members of the church today doing in this matter of soul-saving? The *fact* is, *practically nothing*! Most Christians are doing almost nothing about the most important thing in the world! Does that make any sense whatsoever? Absolutely not!

Indifference to the primary mission of the church (i.e., "soul-saving") is *appalling among us*! So few brethren seem to care much "one way or the other" whether lost souls are saved or not!

But we had better *start caring*, and pronto, or we

will be in certain peril of losing our own souls! From what the Bible teaches, I don't believe the Lord is going to say "well done" to any professed "follower" who was very unconcerned about what He was most concerned! Do you?

HOW DOES GOD FEEL ABOUT YOU?

The Bible teaches that our attitudes and actions cause God certain feelings. For example, in the long ago, it "grieved God at his heart" when He observed the exceeding sinfulness of humanity. Genesis 6:6. And Christians are warned to "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." Ephesians 4:39. Rather we are taught to "offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe." Hebrews 12:28.

Are *you* a source of grief to God, or a source of joy? By your attitude and actions do you declare that God and His cause matters little to you, or do you manifest that it means everything to you?

Think about it, my brethren, *because your eternal destiny hinges on this matter!* Don't think for a moment that God is going to grant you entrance into the celestial city of heaven if you've spent a lifetime grieving Him by indifference, lukewarmness, and total unconcern about His Son Jesus and the cause of truth!

ARE YOU SOWING THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM?

Jesus taught that the "seed" of the kingdom is the word of God. Luke 8:11. When that "seed" is planted in good and honest human hearts, it will produce fruit to God's glory. (God's word will not return unto Him void, but will accomplish that for which it was intended. Isaiah 55:11; see also James 1:18 and I Peter 1:23).

The question that penetrates my heart is this—*"Is the church today really busy sowing the seed?"* Since the church is comprised of individuals, it must be asked of each—*"Are you sowing the seed of the kingdom, brother?"* Countless numbers of professed Christians must reply, "No, I'm too busy with other things."

I implore you, brethren, seek first the kingdom of heaven—plant the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of your loved ones, friends, and neighbours.

You can be assured the devil is busy sowing "tares!" And too many of us are sleeping while he does it. Read Matthew 13:24-30, and 36-43. Woe, woe, woe at the final day for the devil and his helpers, but also for the sleepers!

SAVING ONE'S SELF AND THEM THAT HEAR

When I first determined to be a gospel preacher, I had two goals in mind: (1) To make certain as possible my own eternal salvation, and (2) To save as many

others as possible through faithful proclamation of God's word.

These goals are re-enforced in my mind continually. And especially as I read and meditate upon such Scriptures as I Timothy 4:16, where Paul wrote, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." NIV. The NASV reads this way: "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you."

I pray fervently that some sweet day, both my goals will be wonderfully realized! Unto God be the glory!

REFLECTIONS ON OBEDIENCE

We're living in a day and age when people don't like to be told to do anything. The popular philosophy is "do your own thing." Thus, rebellion and lawlessness are commonly seen in nearly all areas of society.

So strong is this persuasion, that it frequently manifests itself in people's attitude toward God. Many seem to be driven by a compulsion to pit themselves against any established authority, and that includes God. A defiant, obstinate spirit vaunts itself against the Higher Power. Such a posture, is of course, the antithesis of the mind of humble submissiveness we're taught in the Bible to have.

It is clearly established in Sacred Writ, and that repeatedly, that a person must be in obedient subjection to the Almighty God of this universe in order to be acceptable to Him. God will not ignore nor excuse the haughty soul who refuses to follow His Divine will.

Even a most casual reading of the Old Testament impresses the mind with the importance of *obedience to God*. Let me give you just a few such references, and I urge you to read them carefully: Exodus 19:4-8; Leviticus 26:3-24; Numbers 15:30-41; Deuteronomy 4:2-6; 6:17-18; 11:26-28; 28:1-15; 30:14-19; Joshua 1:7-8; Judges 2:11-22; etc. These are only a fraction of the passages that could be cited—and in reading them, one gains the distinct impression of the absolute necessity of obedience to God!!!

And from the New Testament, it is equally clear that obedience to the Lord is essential: Read Matthew 7:21; 24-27; 28:18; Luke 6:46ff; 8:19-21; 11:28; John 3:36 in the ASV, RSV & NASV; Acts 2:38, 41; 5:29, 32; 6:7; Romans 1:5; 16:26; Hebrews 5:8-9; II Thessalonians 1:8-9; I Peter 4:17; II Peter 1:10; Revelation 22:14 in KJV; etc. There is no way one can read these and remain oblivious to the fact—obedience is essential!!

Humankind desperately needs to realize that “man” is not the ultimate being, as the “humanist philosophy” asserts—“*The God that made the world and all things therein, he being Lord of heaven and earth . . .*” Acts 17:24. Manifold evidence of His existence and power are evident, and “man” is without excuse in failing to glorify Him. Read Romans 1:19-22.

Someday, *every* human knee will bow to God, and confess Jesus is Lord. Read Phillipians 2:9-11 and

Romans 14:11-12. I personally choose to do it now, and to live my life in humble obedience and service to the Eternal will. How about you, my friend?

WE MUST OVERCOME!

The Lord promised blessings incomparable to them "that overcome." To each of the seven churches of Asia, such a promise was given. (Please read Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26, and 3:5, 12, 21.) Those promises are equally applicable to the church today.

What does it mean to "overcome?" Naturally, we can gain much insight from the definition of the word . . . it means "to surmount, to conquer . . . to be victor in, to win." Thus, Christians must surmount the obstacles Satan places in their pathway! They must do battle with him and defeat him!

But what are the areas of confrontation? While numerous specific ones might be mentioned, let's note briefly three broad areas—

- (1) *The world*—all the material and temporal things that Satan uses to allure us from true values. I wonder how many multiplied millions have been defeated by Satan at this point . . . he has beguiled them into seeking earthly treasures instead of heavenly ones! And thus deceived, the "cares, riches and pleasures" of this life have choked out God's word. Consider Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 8:14.

- (2) *Fleshly temptations*—Satan “fans the fire” of natural fleshly appetites by constantly barraging us with the sensuous, and enticing to sexual immorality. Innumerable hosts have fallen victim to the heinous intents of the devil in this area. No wonder God's word says so clearly, “keep thyself pure!” I Timothy 5:22. And again, “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” I Peter 2:11.
- (3) *Disappointments and discouragements*—so many of the plans and dreams we mortals formulate go awry. Satan sees to that. Our earthly pilgrimage is filled with “let downs” and hurts. The devil will exploit every advantage these give him over us, and will whip us and crush us with them if we're not determined and strong. Countless ones have gone down for the “count of ten” and have never gotten up from the devastating blows of disappointment and discouragement. But we must resist the devil here as elsewhere and keep getting up, each time with resolute resolve to persevere! Reflect on James 4:7 and Matthew 24:13.

Brethren, we must remember that the precious promises of heavenly glory and joy are only to those “that overcome!” *We just must, therefore, overcome!!! Let us, help each other along the way to do just that!* “Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life!” Revelation 2:10.

THE CURRENT RELEVANCY OF AN “AGE-OLD ISSUE”

A few years ago I had a most invigorating

conversation with a man who once trained for the Catholic priesthood in a Franciscan seminary in New York. We discussed a wide range of "history and doctrines." The discussion kept coming back to this—is the Bible the authority in religious matters, or the Pope?

Close to being somewhat peeved because of "being pressed" on some matters, he said, "It all hinges on Christ selecting Peter as Pope, and passing on His authority through Peter's successors . . . if He did, then my faith in the Catholic church is right . . . if He did not, then the whole structure of Catholicism is without basis." And how well he pinpointed the issue!

It was interesting to note that while he admitted the Bible is the word of God, yet at *any point* of conflict between it and the teachings of the Catholic church he quickly took the side of the Catholic church. And of course, *There are many points of conflict between the Bible and the teachings of the Catholic Church!!!* I pressed him rather hard on why God would say one thing in the Bible and something altogether different through "the living voice of the Catholic Church—the Pope?" This "point" presented him considerable difficulty of explanation to say the least.

The contention of papal proponents is that Jesus built His church upon Peter. The context of Matthew 16:13-19 is cited as the basis for this dogma. However, a close examination of the context shows very clearly that the identity of Jesus as "the Christ' the Son of the living God" is the focal point. It was "upon *this* rock" (i.e., that great bedrock of truth of Christ's deity!) that Jesus said, "I will build my church." Not upon Peter, as the Romanists claims. Jesus simply,

“identified” Peter by name in His reply to him; but since the Greek word, “petros” means “a stone, or a rock,” the Romanists have seized upon this to assert that Peter is “the rock” upon which Christ built His church. In their effort to make Peter “a Pope”, they ignore the fact that Jesus used a different gender (petra) for “the rock” upon which He built His church. Had Jesus intended Peter as “the rock”, He would surely have used precisely the same term.

A number of other Scriptures certainly make it plain that Christ Himself was the “foundation rock” upon which the church was built. Note Acts 4:11-12, I Corinthians 3:11, I Corinthians 10:4, and Ephesians 2:20.

There are several other *major* reasons, convincing beyond any shadow of doubt, that the Lord never intended for Peter to be a “Pope”, and the whole concept “apostolic succession through the papacy” is a fabrication and falsehood. Space does not allow an examination of these reasons in this article, but believe me, they do exist!

Suffice it to say for this writing, that this “age-old issue” is still very relevant today. Some nine-hundred million people are basing their eternal hopes on that which is without basis in fact! It is still relevant, therefore, to teach the truth—that Christ is the head of the church, and not the Pope; that the church is built upon Him, and not Peter; and that the New Testament is the authoritative directive for Christians, and not the dogmas of Popes and councils!

AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY

No gospel preacher should ever take lightly the responsibility assumed in proclaiming God's word! It is of eternal consequence that the message be true and faithfully presented. The man of God must be prayerful and careful in "what" he says, and "how" he says it!

The apostle charged Timothy to "preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching . . ." II Timothy 4:2. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul had told him to "take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching." I Timothy 4:16.

Never should a preacher step into the pulpit without a profound sense of responsibility. He is speaking to human beings, whose spiritual entities will exist forever! He cannot afford to be derelict in his responsibility to herald the truth—plainly, forcefully, without favor or compromise, and yet in love! "Speaking the truth in love . . ." (Ephesians 4:15) is his important task!

No other work in all the world is comparable to it! It is vital! It is paramount! A perishing world desperately needs rescuing! Tens of millions walking in spiritual darkness urgently need their pathway illuminated by truth!

As long as the Lord grants me life and the necessary health, I pledge myself to preach His word in all fidelity, to the best of my ability. I further commit myself that this always be done with a keen sense of urgency, and with a genuine concern for souls. And to the Lord be all the glory, now and forever!

“EXHORT ONE ANOTHER DAY BY DAY”

The possibility of “falling away” is very plainly taught in Hebrews 3:12-15. In view of such a possibility, the Christian needs the encouragement and exhortation that fellow Christians can supply. Thus, the inspired writer teaches us to “exhort one another” in this context.

In chapter 10:23-25, we take note that the exhortation certainly includes the importance of our “own assembling together.” The church coming together to worship God, and to study His word is vital.

I hear some brethren say, “there's more to Christianity than just attendance.” And I subscribe to that statement if it is not just an excuse that people use to forsake the assembly! Assembling together regularly and frequently is a part of God's plan for His people.

Thus, the “Sunday only” concept of Christianity practiced by so many concerns me. It is a symptom of a far deeper spiritual illness! Let us be true and faithful to God “in season and out of season!”

“LOST IN THE CROWD”

In shirking individual responsibility, many members of the church attempt to “get lost in the crowd.” They try to maintain a very low profile and “ease out of” any work assignments.

Such as these might thoroughly enjoy the “good

name" that the church has, and delight in its accomplishments—as long as they don't have to do anything. Sunday morning attendance only is just about all anyone can expect from such persons. They are content with a nominal, half-hearted "brand" of Christianity.

No doubt the church in Sardis had a lot of folks like that. The church itself had somehow gained a good reputation for being "alive" but the Lord knew better. He knew their works, that they were really a "dying" congregation. Too many members there had developed an expertise of being "lost in the crowd."

But the Lord certainly knew who they were! And He was also fully aware of the ones who were really faithful and true. "But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy." Revelation 3:4.

In most every congregation I know of, there is a similar situation. There are always the "faithful few" who do most all the work. Then there are the lukewarm and indifferent who specialize at getting "lost in the crowd." Well, maybe they can get "lost in the crowd" as far as their fellow-men are concerned, but it is for certain they can't escape the eyes of the Lord!!! "There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Hebrews 4:13. That is undoubtedly one of the most arresting statements in all the Bible! Think about it . . . in view of a never ending eternity! And consider further II Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:12.

Don't be among those that are always trying to

get "lost in the crowd," but **COME TO THE FRONT FOR THE LORD AND BE A ZEALOUS WORKER FOR HIS CAUSE!!!!**

ON GOING TO HEAVEN

A person can go to heaven without being famous. And without being rich. And without being high on the social ladder. And without physical prowess or beauty. And without a lot of other things that folks seem to deem so important.

But *NO ONE* can go to heaven without Jesus Christ! "... *in none other is there salvation.*" Acts 4:12. Jesus is Lord! Acts 2:36. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; *no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.*" John 14:6. Again, "I am the door, *by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved . . .*" John 10:9.

Even before His birth, an angel said of Him, "... *it is he that shall save his people from their sins.*" Matthew 1:21. This was the very reason Jesus came into this world . . . to save the lost! He declared, "I am come to seek and to save the lost!" Luke 19:10.

God laid upon Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb, the sins of the world, and "made him to be sin for us" that we might be saved! Read II Corinthians 5:21. Yes, Jesus bore "our sins in his body upon the tree." I Peter 2:24. He died for our sins! I Corinthians 15:3. This He did that He "might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus 2:14) and "deliver us out of this present evil world." Galatians 1:4. He "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Hebrews 9:26.

No wonder the apostle Paul wrote, "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. . . ." I Timothy 1:15. We can understand why he declared, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift." II Corinthians 9:15.

And we anxiously await for the return of our *Savior*, the Lord Jesus Christ, from the portals of heavenly glory (Philippians 3:20) that He might receive us unto Himself, so that where He is, there we "may be also." John 14:3.

RACIAL PREJUDICE

The Ku Klux Klan appears to be attempting a "comeback." Historically, it is an organization that seethes with hatred and breeds on racial prejudice. Such a spirit is wrong and sinful, and therefore I find it particularly revolting when hooded spokesmen try to link the Klan with Christianity. The KKK is the antithesis of Christianity!

Racial prejudice is nothing new. It is an ancient thing. But its antiquity lends no credence to it whatsoever. It was wrong in times past, and it is wrong now. And members of the Lord's church, of all people, should *know* that!

God graphically demonstrated to Peter that he was "not to call any man common!" Read Acts 10:1-29, and especially verse 28. Peter said, "of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is acceptable to him." Verses 34-35. To

reject persons that God accepts puts the rejector in the position of opposing God! Think about that!

Small children have no racial prejudice. It is a learned thing. Just as Peter learned to be prejudiced toward Gentiles. He had to "unlearn" what he had learned, because what he had learned was wrong! Probably most of us would have to admit that somehow along the way we too have learned at least some racial prejudice. I must plead guilty to having imbibed a degree of such myself. But from a study of God's word I see clearly that it is wrong, and therefore I have made an earnest effort to eradicate it from my heart. And I believe this is what every true Christian must sincerely try to do.

It doesn't matter to God what a person's color is, nor does it matter to Him what a person's nationality is, nor what his economic or social status is. God loved all humankind so much that He provided salvation for all! Jesus gave His life for all! The gospel is for all! And if we are going to be Christians, we are going to have to see this great truth and conform our outlook to it! There is no way we can hate anyone and still be followers of Christ! Sure there are "problems in racial relationships" facing our society, but let's meet them with a loving and kind attitude, and understanding.

In James 2:1-9, the inspired writer discusses the poor man coming into the assembly of God's people. But the principle could apply to nationality, or to race, just the same. James insists that love is the answer! And he concludes by saying, "but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin . . ." Verse 9. And all of us surely know that "the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23.

Let us learn what is right and true, my brethren,
and act accordingly.

“NO SUBSTITUTES, PLEASE”

A man was placing an order by phone and concluded by saying, “No substitutes, please.” He was aware that we live in a day and age of substitutions and synthetics. Anymore, the “real McCoy” is liable to be simulated! And regretfully, it is true with the gospel also. Men have subtly slipped in a facsimile message in place of the *real thing!* I for one cry aloud, “*No substitutes, please!*” The gospel is God's power to save! Romans 1:16. Preach the word! II Timothy 4:2.

BE NOT ANXIOUS

Recently I read this little thought from an unknown author's pen: “*Ulcers are the results of mountain climbing over mole hills.*” There is a lot of food for reflection in that! When will we ever learn to obey our Lord and cease destructive worrying? Jesus said, “Be not therefore anxious for the morrow . . .” Matthew 6:34, ASV. Remember, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31.

BUILDING UP—NOT TEARING DOWN!

When each member of a congregation is intent on building up the church, great are the results! There is power in the positive approach! The work of the Lord

flourishes when brethren love each other, care for each other, and shoulder together the responsibilities entailed in carrying out the great commission of Christ. Ephesians 4:15-16 certainly teaches us that this is the Lord's will for us! Please reflect upon those two verses carefully.

On the other hand, there is nothing more destructive to the on-going of the Cause than a prevailing attitude of negativism! Whenever brethren are more concerned with tearing down than they are with building up, the effects are devastating! "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." Galatians 5:15.

Let each of us resolve to be a church builder—*never* a church destroyer! May we ever keep in mind—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Psalms 133:1

THE HEART OF IT ALL

The essence of Christianity is *righteousness, peace, and joy*! This is what citizenship in the Lord's kingdom is really all about! The apostle Paul makes that quite clear in Romans 14:17. And this was in principle the exact same thing that Jesus taught concerning the "weightier matters" of *justice, mercy, and faith*. Matthew 23:23.

From both contexts, we might well conclude that every facet of Christian duty and responsibility is important, but there are some things which are *The heart of it all*. And six of these things are specified in the two verses cited above. Others of similar import

can be found in Colossians 3:12-17, and Galatians 5:22-23.

Members of the church need desperately to learn this! One great besetting sin among us has been the tendency to "major in minors!" And Jesus pointed out the error of this inclination in a scathing indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. Note verse 24: "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."

Please don't misunderstand me . . . I do not mean to say that any part of our total responsibility and commitment to God is unimportant, because that is not true. *It is very important* that we cleave to every item of truth, and preach it like it is! As Jesus said, "these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone."

All I am saying is this—*Let us not miss the very essence of Christianity* amidst our efforts to restore the pattern of sound doctrine! Let us do the latter, all right, and be insistent in it, *But let us do it with the right attitude*. Let us know that at THE HEART OF IT ALL is righteousness, peace, joy, justice, faith, and mercy. May God help us to "keep our balance" in living and proclaiming the true and total picture of Christianity!

EXCITED FOR CHRIST

I am convinced that if we could ever get the church really excited about Christ and His cause, there would be no mountain that we couldn't climb!

Mind you, we don't need just more excited Christians—we've already got tens of thousands of them—excited Christians—excited for the things of this world! What we need are more Christians excited for Christ! Children of God on fire with zeal for His will! Redeemed who will say so! Saved who are busy saving! Those who have been told of Christ out telling! Those who are sold out selling!

We need Christians so excited for Christ and His way that their exuberance and enthusiasm runneth over! Those who know they've received so much, and who can't be happy unless they're giving unselfishly of their time and money and talents! Enough of listlessness! Down with half-heartedness! Away with nominality! Let the Lord's church forever bury lukewarmness and apathy, and come alive as never before! "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee!" (Eph. 5:14)

Kindle that flame! Fan the fire! Let us light this cold, dark world—not with flames of war, but with the radiant light that Christ is Savior, Lord and King! I challenge Christians everywhere—quit being excited for the things of this world, and let's all get excited for Christ and His cause!

"THE FAITH"

When the inspired writer, Jude, wrote his brief epistle in the first century, he urged Christians to "contend earnestly for *the faith* which was once for all delivered unto the saints." Jude 3. Obviously, he was not referring to the personal faith of individuals in

giving such instruction, but to that system of religion that Jesus brought to the world. "The faith" is equated with "the Way" in the New Testament. And since the Scriptures plainly teach there is only *one* way, then there is no other logical conclusion to embrace but that there is only *one* faith! As Jesus said, "I am the way." (John 14:6), Paul declared that there is "one faith." Ephesians 4:5.

Therefore, people are in error when they think in terms of there being "many faiths." This fallacious concept is often manifested in conversations among people. Perhaps someone inquires of another, "What faith are you?" Actually, what they mean is, "Which church do you belong to?" Such terminology is employed because most people have been led to believe that there are many churches (and thus, many faiths) and that one is as good as another, and that it doesn't matter which church a person belongs to. Such inquirers would be speechless if the respondent said, "I am of the faith once for all delivered. I am a Christian, a member of the Lord's church."

The Bible teaches plainly that there is only "one body" and identifies that one body as being *the* church. Read Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 4:4. The fact that *many* so-called "churches" exist today does not alter the truth that Christ established only *one*. He said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18. He purchased it with His own blood, giving His life for it. Acts 20:28 and Ephesians 5:25. It is His church, and God gave Him to be the head of it. Ephesians 1:20-23.

When a person hears the gospel of Christ, believes it, and obeys it (by repenting, confessing faith in Jesus

Christ as God's Son, and being baptized), he enters into the body of Christ. He thus becomes a Christian, a member of the Lord's church . . . saved through God's grace and cleansed by Christ's blood. To be in *the* church is to be in *the* Way . . . it is to have embraced the faith . . . to be a child of God, and a citizen of the heavenly kingdom.

The world needs to hear the plain truth on this matter. And not only so, our own brethren need to be retaught these basic fundamentals, because far too many don't know the difference any longer between denominationalism and New Testament Christianity.

A FALLACIOUS EQUATION

Many members of the church seem to think that there are essentially two things involved in being a Christian:

First, there is "*attendance.*" *Our brethren have come to measure faithfulness to the Lord by "attendance."* If one is most generally present on Sunday morning he is said to be "*pretty faithful.*" If, in addition, he comes on Sunday night too, he is assessed as "*faithful.*" If he is present on Wednesday nights as well as on Sunday he is "*very faithful!*" It doesn't seem to be a matter of consideration as to the individual's attitude, or whether he is involved in really trying to build the church up, and save souls . . . the emphasis is on "*attendance.*"

Secondly, some attention is given to "life-style," and in this matter, the focal point revolves around "abstinence" from a few certain things—the individual is not to get drunk, shoot-dope, nor engage in immoral conduct. It doesn't seem to be "too big-a-deal" if he lies a little, gambles a little, drinks a little, cusses a little, and perhaps is dishonest, covetous, and a big gossip. The emphasis is on *abstaining* from "the big three." Any other form of misconduct or questionable demeanor is generally excused or overlooked.

What it amounts to is that brethren have formulated an equation in their own minds as to what constitutes being a Christian—it is A (attendance) + A (abstinence from the big 3) = *being a Christian*. This is a false equation.

While I certainly *would not minimize* the importance of regular attendance when the saints assemble, nor the importance of abstaining from "the big three," yet I do *affirm there is still much more involved in being a Christian!*

A Christian is one who loves the Lord and His cause more than everything else in this world combined! Such a one certainly will assemble with the saints at every opportunity, and will abstain from immorality, drunkness, and the dope scene. But he will also feast on the "living bread," and drink deeply of the "living waters" until the Lord's will has indeed permeated his total being! *Christ is everything to him! The Cause means more to him than life itself! He does indeed seek first the Lord's kingdom in all that he plans for and hopes for!*

A more correct equation would be something like this: A sense of deep need + a humble spirit + implicit faith and trust+ submissive obedience to the Lordship of Christ + a keen awareness of the grace and mercy by which we're saved + diligent study of the Scriptures + the desire to assemble and worship at every opportunity + a right attitude in all things + putting the kingdom of the Lord *First* + shunning what is wrong + always trying to do what is right + fidelity to truth + unwavering faithfulness to the Savior = being a Christian. And even then, thinking, "Though I really have tried, and continue to try to do all He would have me to do, at very best I am an unprofitable servant." See Luke 17:10.

DO ANY TODAY HAVE "HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM?"

The reason the apostles received "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" was twofold: (1) *to be inspired to preach God's word inerrantly*, and (2) *to be enabled to confirm the message proclaimed by miraculous means*. The complete revelation of God was not finished until the end of the first century, and the apostles needed Divine help to insure total accuracy in their preaching and writing, and they needed to be able to convince the people to whom they preached that they were indeed spokesmen of God. Thus, Christ promised them the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" that they might be miraculously empowered as His witness. Read carefully Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:1-8; and Acts 2:1-4. And further, read John 14:26; and John 16:13.

In Mark 16:15-20, we find our Lord commissioning the apostles to *preach* the gospel to every creature, and we are informed that they went forth "and *preached* everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word* by the signs that followed." The sacred record emphasizes this in Acts 14:3, concerning Paul and Barnabas: "Long time they tarried there *speaking boldly* in the Lord, *who bare witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.*" In another place, the Scriptures inquire, "how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? Which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, *was confirmed* unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will." Hebrews 2:3-4.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were designed of God to assist the church in its infancy. But He never intended for these miraculous empowerings to continue indefinitely. They were to serve their purpose, then cease. That is precisely what Paul taught in I Corinthians 13:8-10. "That which is perfect" in verse 10 undoubtedly refers to the complete revelation of God's will. This was accomplished by the end of the first century A.D. The word of God had been *revealed*, and *confirmed* by that time, and the early church had been cared for in a special way during its infancy. When the need was no longer there, the supernatural aid stopped.

I affirm that no one living today has any miraculous power given by the Holy Spirit. No one today has "the baptism of the Holy Spirit," nor any miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, all the claims, to the contrary not withstanding.

ERODING CONVICTIONS

The following is an imaginary, brief interview of an average New Testament Christian of some years ago: Q—Do you believe the Bible is the inspired word of God and authoritative in all matters of religious belief and practice? A—Yes sir! There is no doubt in my mind about this. Q—Do you believe there is just one true church? A—Indeed I do, because that is what the New Testament plainly teaches! Q—Do you believe that there are saved persons in the denominational world? A—I can only believe what the Bible teaches, and it says the Lord added to *the* church such as were being saved. Acts 2:47. This is why I try so hard to teach people the truth, because Christ said "the truth shall make you free." John 8:32. Nothing else will suffice! Q—How do you feel about the use of mechanical instruments of music? A—I believe them to be sinful and wrong in the worship of God because the New Testament does not authorize their use. To use them is to go beyond "what is written" and such is plainly condemned in the sacred Scriptures. Q—What is your view of social drinking, revelling, promiscuity, and such like? A—The Bible says that whosoever would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4. It also

says "love not the world," I John 2:15ff, "be not conformed to the world," Romans 12:2, "abstain from every form of evil," I Thessalonians 5:22, and "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." I Peter 2:11. How much plainer would it have to be? Q—What kind of preaching do you think the church needs? A—The preaching should be straightforward, bold, and plain . . . definitive. There should be no doubt as to what is proclaimed, and it should be right from the Bible. "Thus saith the Lord" will resound from every pulpit of the true church!

A similar interview in our day and time might sound something like this: Q—Is the Bible inspired and is it authoritative? A—Well, er, ah, I think we need to qualify what we mean here . . . er, ah, I do think it contains much good . . . er, yes, truth, but I'm not sure that total truth is obtainable, and interpretations vary you know . . . and er, ah, I'm not so sure. Q—Do you think there is just one true church? A—Well, er, ah, I wouldn't want to go that far . . . people are offended when we preach that, you know. Q—Do you believe there are saved persons in all churches? A—Well, er, ah, I know what the Bible teaches, but I prefer to think that as long as they are sincere, they'll be all right . . . regardless of what II John 9 says. Q—What do you think about using instruments of music in worship? A—Well, er, ah, I wouldn't necessarily advocate using them, but, er, ah, I'm not so sure it would hurt anything too much. Q—What is your feeling on wordliness in the church? A—Well, now, everybody's got to sow some wild oats, haven't they? Ha. What harm is there is an occasional drink and a little fun now and then? After all, everybody's doing it. Q—What kind of preaching do you think the

church needs? A—Well, sir, you've finally asked me one I am an expert on . . . what we need are short sermons, about 15 or 20 minutes at the most . . . and positive . . . yes sir, they must be positive . . . none of this negative preaching for me! Whatever we do, we don't want to offend anyone . . . why some of the preaching we've had will drive people away, etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., ad nauseam!

And we wonder why the church isn't growing?!?

SHALL FAITH BE FOUND?

As recorded in Luke 18:8, Jesus asked the question, "*when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*" In view of the context of verses 1-8, most commentators think that the question was directed to the disciples, as to whether they would keep believing that God would avenge them of their adversaries even if such were not as immediate as they hoped. Since God delays what we might deem "speedy" justice, because of His longsuffering toward sinners, there was (and is today) the possibility that doubt would pervade the hearts of the disciples. God wants His own to trust Him, and to continue in prayer, believing that there will indeed be a just recompense of reward, for the righteous and the evil. Thus, the question, "will there still be believers, *whenever* the Lord chooses to come?"

Let us ponder the question a bit more extensively—when Jesus comes again, will there still be those who are courageously holding to "*the* faith? Will there still be those who love the truth and the Way of

the Lord so much, that despite what an incredibly wicked world thinks or practices, they will remain loyal and true? Will there still be those who will keep "the faith" even if it means suffering death at the hands of a humanistic, atheistic controlled society?

It is an arresting question indeed—*"Shall faith be found on the earth when the Lord Jesus returns?"* In seeking an answer, I think it appropriate that we first assess ourselves—what about those of us who are Christians, *now*? How deep-seated is our individual faith in God? And in Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God? How strong is our confidence in the Bible as the word of God? How uncompromising is our belief that salvation is in Christ Jesus alone, given only to those who trust Him and obey Him? How unwavering is our conviction that there is "one body," and that the one body is *the* church, and that the church is the "called-out" of Christ, the redeemed? How committed are we to the *One Way*? Are there tendencies to compromise, and to water-down the full import of truth among us?

And projecting ourselves into the future, if the Lord permits such to be, and the world grows increasingly evil (II Timothy 3:13, though I can't imagine it being any worse than it is now!), and the pressures mount to destroy faith, what is going to happen? Well, I don't know for certain, but I do know that we had better be "girding up" for any eventuality. Read I Peter 1:13-17. Let us "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might," and "put on the whole armor of God . . ." Read Ephesians 6:10ff.

“BUILD YOUR HOPES—ON THINGS ETERNAL”

In the latter part of the third century B.C. Alexander the Great led the Greeks on world conquest. He was very successful, extending the influence, culture, and language of Greece widely. But now, centuries later, only remnant pieces remain to tell us of the grandeur that once was.

And preceding the Greeks were a number of others, such as Egypt under the Pharaohs. What enormous wealth was theirs! And the splendor of their kingdom was of great renown. But now, only museums filled with relics and the ingeniously built pyramids tell the story.

Perhaps the most famous empire of all time was that of the Romans. Truly it was a great one, lasting for some five hundred years! More than likely, the people who lived in the first century B.C., and in the first, second, and third centuries A.D., thought it would never end. But it did! Its glory faded. And all of its beautiful buildings, and great theaters and stadiums, and statues and monuments began to succumb to the devastating ravishes of time. And today, we see only what is left . . . crumbled ruins!

I often reflect on the words of a well-known hymn (written by a faithful Christian, F.L. Eiland, who died in 1909)—“Time is filled with swift transition, naught of earth unmoved can stand . . . build your hopes on things eternal, hold to God's unchanging hand!” How true, how true!

So many things upon which people place such importance in reality matter little. Over the “long-haul,” what difference does it make how fine a house

we lived in, how much money we had in the bank, or what treasures we accumulated, ad infinitum? ***THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, IS WHETHER OR NOT WE HAVE PREPARED FOR ETERNITY BY LOVING GOD AND DOING HIS WILL!***

Brother Eiland penned words of wisdom when he wrote that beautiful song, "Hold To God's Unchanging Hand." His message in music was "right on target!" Thus, to all who may chance to read this brief article, may I remind that time is rapidly passing by and we each are drawing nearer to eternity with every fleeting moment. "Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation!" II Corinthians 6:2.

ONLY ONE WAY TO HEAVEN

The apostle Paul declared, "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...*" I Timothy 1:15.

But Jesus will not save those who reject Him, and who shun His invitation. The Lord invited all: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest..." Matthew 11:28. Yet, millions reject Jesus and refuse to respond to His loving offer of salvation! Countless more neglect doing anything about it. The Bible teaches that such will be lost forever! Read II Thessalonians 1:8-9. Christ saves only those "who obey him!" Hebrews 5:9. No wonder then the apostles were so intense in their admonition to "be ye reconciled to God!" II Corinthians 5:20.

Do you want to go to heaven someday? Are you heavenward bound? *Christ is the only way!!!* I urge all who read this, who are not yet Christians, to believe in Him as the Son of the Living God . . . as *the* Savior of the world! Then be willing to repent of your sins, determining to turn from what is wrong and sinful to what is right and true! And from the heart and with your mouth confess your faith in Jesus as God's Son before your fellow man, and be baptized into Him in order to obtain the remission of sins. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved!" Mark 16:16. And Peter told believers to "repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins . . ." Acts 2:38. The Lord will add such as sincerely do this to His church. Thus, having entered "*The Way*," having become Christians, these will want to be faithful to the Lord in every aspect of their lives, knowing He has promised "the crown of life" to those who remain faithful, even to the point of giving their lives for Him. Revelation 2:10.

DEFINING THE CHURCH

When we speak of "the church," what are we talking about? A building made of brick or stone? Or some sort of superstructured human organization with religious overtones? What is the church anyway? What does the Bible teach about the matter?

Upon investigation of the Scriptures, one finds that *the church is—*

1. *The "called out of Christ"* . . . people called by the gospel, out of the world of spiritual darkness into God's marvelous light. Read II Thessalonians 2:14, and I Peter 2:9. As the Lord's people, these no longer "walk" in the ways of the world, but in the paths of righteousness. See II Corinthians 6:17-7:1, Ephesians 5:15-17, and Romans 13:13-14.
2. *The spiritual body of the saved.* Those who respond in trusting obedience to the gospel, as did the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, are added by the Lord to the church. Read Acts 2:37-41, 47. In accepting the terms of pardon contained in the message of "good news," such individuals have been cleansed of sin through the atoning blood of Christ, and thus saved by the grace of God. Read Romans 3:21-25a; Romans 6:3-5; and Ephesians 2:4-8. Salvation is a "free gift" of God, graciously offered to those who believe in and obey the gospel. See II Corinthians 9:15; and I Peter 1:22. Salvation is *only* "in Christ" and to be in Christ is to be in His spiritual body, which is the church. See Galatians 3:26-27; I Corinthians 13:13, 27; Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 5:23; and II Timothy 2:10.
3. *The redeemed!* Those who have responded obediently to the gospel, and have by so doing entered Christ, have indeed been purchased of Christ! The purchase price was His own precious blood! Read I Peter 1:18-19, and Acts 20:28. Those so purchased of Christ are "a people for his own possession," (Titus 2:14), and do not belong to themselves, but to Him who bought them. I

Corinthians 6:19-20. Christians are truly a people for God's own possession! I Peter 2:9.

4. *The body of the reconciled.* It was God's design that those who would respond to His loving call by believing and obeying the gospel, which was made a reality by the sacrifice of Jesus, would be reconciled unto Himself in one body . . . the body being the church. Read Ephesians 2:13-22. The church, in turn, has the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to it, and busies itself in sharing the gospel message with others. II Corinthians 4:5-7 and 5:17-21.

Other things could be cited in defining the church, such as: it is the family of God; it is the kingdom of Christ; and it is a spiritual temple, comprised of living stones, to offer up sacrifice to God through Christ. I Peter 2:5. But hopefully, what has been said in this brief article will serve the purpose intended . . . to cause us to love the Lord and His church more and to put His cause first; understanding what the church is should help considerably.

ON BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

The church is "the called out" of Christ. That is what the Greek word, translated by the English word "church" means—"the called out." The Bible teaches us that people are "called" by the gospel. II Thessalonians 2:14. Thus, when one hears the gospel, believes it, and renders an obedient response to the

commands contained therein, he indeed has been "called" by it.

The gospel means "good news." This good news is the message of God's wonderful love, mercy, and grace offered to human kind through the personage of His Son Jesus Christ and the GREAT sacrifice that Christ made for us on the cross. The apostle Paul defines it quite clearly in I Corinthians 15:1-4. This message is God's designated power to save those who believe it, and who will obey the Christ. Read Romans 1:16, I Corinthians 1:18-23, and Hebrews 5:8-9.

It should be quite clear to even the casual reader of the New Testament that the same process by which a person is saved from sin is the same process by which that person becomes a member of the Lord's church. Acts 2:22-41,47, is as clear on this as can be. Those people in Jerusalem on the Jewish feast day called Pentecost, who believed the gospel that they heard, inquired what they must do. They were told to "repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins. . ." The record then tells us that "they then that received his word were baptized. . ." And these were "added" to God's family. Thus, verse 47 informs us that "the Lord added to the church daily" those that were being saved.

Baptism (which is immersion in water of a penitent believer, unto the remission of sins) was the culminating act of obedience that puts a person *into* Christ Jesus. Two passages of Scripture make that exceedingly plain: Galatians 3:26-27, and Romans 6:3-5, 17-18. The Bible also teaches us that baptism is "into the body." I Corinthians 12:13. The "one body" is the church—Ephesians 1:20-23, 4:4; Colossians 1:18,

24. Thus, entrance "into Christ" is the same as entrance into "the one body," which is the church. *The church is the spiritual body of christ!*

To be "in Christ" is the same as being "a member of His church," which is the same as being "a Christian."

There is no such thing in the Bible about "being saved" in one way and then "joining the church of your choice" in some other way. Such thinking is un-Scriptural, completely!

ARE THERE SAVED IN ALL CHURCHES?

The common viewpoint of people in the denominational world is "that it doesn't make any difference which church a person belongs to," because "we're all going to the same place, but just in different ways." This concept is indeed the popular thing to believe—in fact, *people want to believe it!* They want to believe it because it removes the consternation people would otherwise experience when friends and loved ones "hold to" doctrines that are diametrically opposite to the truth.

For whatever reasons, there is a growing tendency, it seems to me, for more and more members of the Lord's church to imbibe such an outlook. This is a natural result, when one considers a decline in Bible knowledge within our ranks, and the inclination "to be like the others" about us. Tragically, the church, throughout the land, has so many half-converted, ill-informed members, that a drift toward denomi-

nationalism and its concepts poses a great danger. It is no real surprise, then, that many members of the church have indeed embraced the idea that "there are saved in all churches."

But can one substantiate such a philosophy from the Scripture? Doesn't it matter any longer what the Bible teaches? Do keep in mind, that *the Bible is the word of God!* Read II Timothy 3:16-17.

The Bible teaches that "all spiritual blessings are in Christ." Ephesians 1:3. To be "in Christ" is to be "in the church" over which Christ has been made the head, and of which He is the Savior! Ephesians 1:20-23; 5:23 and I Corinthians 12:12-14, 27. The apostle Paul declared that there is but "*one body!*" Since there is only *one* body, and since the body is the church, then there is only *one* church! Ephesians 4:4.

The Scriptures plainly teach that those who hear the gospel message, believe it, and render submissive obedience to the terms of pardon the Lord gave "enter Christ." Christ adds these that are being saved to the church. See Acts 2:41, 47. Thus, the process by which penitent believers are saved from sin is the same process by which they become members of the church. *The Lord's church is the spiritual body of the saved.*

There's no such thing as being saved, yet being outside the Lord's church. *The Lord adds the saved to the church! Apart from Christ people are lost . . . and those of responsible mind and age who have not obeyed the gospel are apart from Christ. To be apart from Christ is the same as being outside His church, thus, those outside His church are lost.*

If a person really believes the Bible is the word of God, this is what he must believe, because this is what the Bible plainly teaches. We must preach it as it is!

“EXPLAIN IT FOR US, DR. ATHEIST”

Imagine a great gathering of people which have assembled to seek information concerning the existence of the universe, and life; Listen, as the emcee addresses the people . . .

“Ladies and gentlemen—we've gathered here to consider possible explanations for two things we know to exist: first, the universe, and secondly, life. By definition, the universe is 'the whole body of things; the entire celestial cosmos—the totality of the observed or postulated physical world.' We know that it exists, and the magnitude of it all is mind boggling and defies our imagination, but how it came to be is not so clear. And as for the subject of life, I think we all know what it is, but where it came from, and how, is a mystery. We've chosen as our speaker the internationally famous scientists and philosopher, Dr. Ima Sophisticated Atheist, who holds a number of doctorate degrees from several great universities, etc. etc. etc. Dr. Atheist is known for intellectual brilliance, etc. etc. etc. And now, I present to you Dr. Atheist.” A hushed silence comes over the crowd as all ears are attentive . . . Dr. Atheist steps to the microphone exuding an egotistical attitude of having all the answers . . . he speaks

“I am happy for this occasion to explain the universe, and life itself. Let us note the universe first. Ah, the great probability, we think, er, uh, is that most likely there was, ah, some form of gaseous nebula, and ah, uh we surmise that it was very hot. Yes, ah, we're quite certain, ah, very hot indeed. We theorize, ah, you see, er, that this nebula was in motion, and ah, though there are a few things which

are not quite clear, ah, at this time, uh, yet we are, ah, reasonably sure, ah, that possibly, er, uh the heat and motion combined, ah to fragment the nebula. And you see, in the cooling process, we er, think, that the fragmented gaseous materials, ah, solidified, and this, uh, accounts for the celestial bodies, and in accounting for that, well ah, we feel that this pretty well accounts for the whole thing. Now life presents a little bit more of a problem. The great chances are, ah, that the rays from the sun, uh, ah, acted on some form of primeval matter, ah, the chemical composition of which we, er, could well have, perhaps, interacted together to bring about life. This we call spontaneous generation. Ah, ah, from this beginning of life, through, ah, it is believed several billions of years, uh, all the varied forms of life have evolved, with each form, ah, being influenced by the environment, and the strong surviving, until finally man appeared as a distinct form. Er, that concisely, is the explanation."

Applause breaks out, and cheers, "Yea, yea, yea for Dr. Atheist! What intellect! What brilliance! How learned can one man be!?! Weren't his explanations marvellous!?! After several moments of expressed accolades for Dr. Atheist, the emcee asks for questions

"Yes, sir, the gentleman to the right, with his hand up; someone give him the microphone." Whereupon a humble looking man is handed the microphone . . . and speaks . . .

"My friends, the explanations for the universe and life, given by the learned Dr. Atheist doesn't really make any sense to me. Isn't it far more logical to believe that an all wise and powerful God created everything, as the Bible says?"

He is immediately interrupted by booing and jeers . . . this continues for several minutes, until finally the emcee restores order. One by one, a number of Dr. Atheist's colleagues belittle the concept of a creative God, and intimate that such an explanation is palpably inferior, 'poking' fun at anyone who would even entertain such an idea.

Finally, the meeting is adjourned, and the intellectually elite smugly depart, their human pride having taken them to the summit of folly. One man leaves alone, shaking his head in dismay at what he has heard, but remembering in his heart the words of the apostle Paul— "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," (I Corinthians 3:19) and "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Romans 1:22.

A TROUBLED WORLD

"Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." Job. 14:1. There is no question about it, this is a troubled world! And the lives of everyone in it are "full of trouble" of one sort or another. Life is a struggle from start to finish. And it would be cause for despair apart from Jesus Christ. The Christian hope transcends this troubled world. Read carefully II Corinthians 4:7 through 5:8. Praise be to God!

PREPARED HEARTS

I don't believe anyone is what he is, morally and

spiritually, by accident. A person is what he is by choice. It is true that circumstances can certainly make it easier, or more difficult for a person to choose one way or the other . . . but still, in the final analysis, we are creatures of choice, and we are the products of the choices we make.

In the long ago, Samuel urged the people of Israel with these words: “. . . *prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only . . .*” I Samuel 7:3. Many years later, we have an example of a young man who did precisely what Samuel had admonished; the young man's name was Daniel. The Bible tells us that “. . . *he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself . . .*” Daniel 1:8. Daniel made a choice, and it was made in the midst of adverse circumstances!

But to look at the “other side” of the matter, we read of such persons as Rehoboam, who “. . . did evil, because he *prepared not* his heart to seek the Lord.” II Chronicles 12:14.

No wonder the Biblical injunction: “*Keep thy heart* with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” Proverbs 4:23.

In a world filled with evil, it is of paramount importance that each of us prepares his or her heart to do what is right. If we allow it to be, the heart can become a receptacle for evil. And the “stench” will be readily apparent to all. Consider Matthew 15:18-20.

Most earnestly I exhort each one who reads this article to examine your heart! (Read II Corinthians 13:5) If you discover anything amiss, eradicate it from your life before it is too late! Don't allow Satan to triumph in the ruination of your soul! But he will, *if you prepare not your heart!*

PREPARE YOUR HEART to serve the Lord and

do what is right and true, and the victory will be yours through His grace. "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." I Corinthians 15:57.

"AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR ME"

Galatians 2:20 is certainly among the most beautiful writings of the apostle Paul. Paul expressed his intent of being "crucified with Christ" and living his life for Christ . . . but why? What was the motivation? Because he was overwhelmed by Christ's love for him, and the fact that *He "gave himself up for me."*

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was to Paul very personal. He saw himself as the object of the Lord's love, and the reason for His sacrifice! But, my friends, this is true with every individual human being. It is just as true for you and me as it was for Paul.

Think of it as it pertains to you. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, loved *you* so much that He left the glorious realm of heaven to come to this earth, for the very purpose of giving Himself "up" as a sacrifice for your sins, that *you* might be set free from sin's bondage and consequences! Oh what love . . . what wondrous love!!!

And I certainly want to think of it personally, too. It is staggering for me to ponder . . . "Why did my Savior come to earth, and to the humble go? Because He loved me so! Why did He drink the bitter cup of sorrow, pain and woe? Why on the cross be lifted up? Because He loved me so! He gave His precious life for

me, because he loved me so!"

In view of His love for me, and for you . . . in view of the tremendous sacrifice He made for us, how can we keep from loving Him? How could anyone not be grateful?

It makes me feel just like Paul stated: "I have been crucified with Christ: and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me."

"AND THERE THEY PREACHED THE GOSPEL"

The words in the above caption are found in Acts 14:7. They bring to my mind, as I reflect upon them, that there will never be a substitute for preaching the gospel!

God put power in the gospel message! Romans 1:16. It was His design that through its proclamation, those who believe could be saved! Note I Corinthians 1:18, and verses 21 through 24.

This is the very reason that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded the apostles to herald it to every nation: "Go ye into all the world, and *preach the gospel* to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Mark 16:15-16.

No wonder then that the apostle Paul charged Timothy in such a pungent way: "*Preach the word*; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke,

exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching . . . " Read II Timothy 4:11ff.

I pray fervently that churches of Christ will never become derelict in their great responsibility of preaching the gospel! Let us always be true to God, by faithfully proclaiming *His word* to those who will listen.

THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP

Throughout the brotherhood, the #1 problem in the church is a lack of dynamic leadership. While this is widely recognized, far too little is being done to correct the situation. Perhaps it is because we just can't bring ourselves to "face the facts."

Members of the church don't want to face the fact of inadequate leadership because it is frustrating, and they really don't know what to do about it anyway. Elders don't relish facing the fact because objective self-evaluation is painful. Preachers oftentimes ignore the fact because they know that to point it out is the best way in the world to be "sent packing." Thus, they become more "job" conscious than "Cause" conscious.

The result is that near to nothing is being done to improve matters. Innumerable congregations are "hamstrung" with incompetent leaderships. And these situations are perpetuated because brethren are too timid and fearful to speak up on the issue, or else they just don't know what to do or say.

Please consider prayerfully three suggestions on how I believe we can help bring about the day wherein each congregation of the Lord's church will have a

well-qualified, effective leadership—

1. We need to do more encouraging of our boys and young men to become capable and visionary leaders in the church. We should try to create within their hearts a burning aspiration to serve the Cause of our Lord . . . giving to Christ their very best!
2. As we have insisted on preachers being properly educated and trained, why not let's produce quality leadership the same way? Why should a preacher be any more qualified for his work than an elder is for the tremendous responsibility that is his? "Leadership" is fully as important as "preachership!" While we wouldn't long tolerate a man in the pulpit who is inept, the church often *suffers-long* with men in positions of leadership who possess scarcely any aptitude for it. Brethren, does that make any sense?
3. As we expect a preacher to keep on studying, learning, growing and improving, so we also should expect the same of those and who serve as elders. Elders should earnestly seek to become more and more effective as *leaders!* ***THE CAUSE THAT IS SECOND TO NONE DESERVES OUR BEST!!!***

This article is not some sort of harangue. It comes from my heart . . . a heart that I know is filled with love for the Lord, and for His church. I simply want to help the church today, as best I can, to be all that God would have it to be. And it desperately needs dynamic leadership to get the job done!

SHOULD WE WANT ALL MEN TO SPEAK WELL OF US?

Have you ever heard it said of another, "That person doesn't have an enemy in this world . . . everybody speaks well of him"? Our usual response to such a statement is something like this—"Isn't that wonderful!"

But is it really so wonderful? Jesus said, "No!" Our Lord's exact words to His disciples are as follows: "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake . . . *Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!* For in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets." Luke 6:22-26.

Jesus knew that if everyone spoke well of one of His disciples that it could only mean one thing—compromise of righteous conduct, or of true doctrine. Our Savior realized that if an individual lived right and taught the truth aggressively, resentment and hatred would be stirred against him.

The fact of the matter is this—true Christians shouldn't want everybody speaking well of them! This does not mean that we should go around unnecessarily antagonizing people. It simply means that by upright living and promulgation of the truth we will indeed make enemies. Those of the "darkness" hate the "light." See John 3:19-20. Therefore, people that are not living right, and propagators of religious error won't speak well of us.

My Christian brother and sister, remember this—a person is known not only by those who are his friends, but by those who are his enemies as well.

Personally, there are some people I cherish as my friends. It honors me when they speak well of me. But there are many others whom I don't want speaking well of me.

And yet, concerning those who are our enemies, we should love them, and pray for them. Matthew 5:44. There is always the hope of converting them to Christ and His way.

SHINING FOREVER IN RESPLENDENT GLORY

Gross inequities exist on earth. "Wrong" often prevails while "right" is put-down. Evil ones seem many times to prosper as righteous ones suffer. Our hearts cry out for true justice!

And we can rest assured that the *JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH* will do right! Someday the "scales will be balanced!" Truth will triumph! Good will be victorious! Evil will forever be vanquished! The devil and all his helpers will be consigned to hell-fire!

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!" Matthew 13:43. Beloved, those are the words of Jesus. They were spoken of His faithful followers! Just think of it! The saved of the SHINING as the sun!

Over 500 years before the coming of Jesus Christ, the prophet Daniel had foretold of this same thing. He said, *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."* Daniel 12:3.

I can't speak for others, but the very thought of this staggers my imagination! To anticipate that GREAT DAY OF RIGHTEOUS JUDGEMENT (Read Acts 17:31 and Romans 14:10b-12) when the separation of the just and the unjust shall be made (See Matthew 25:31-46) and Christians shall be forever exonerated and exalted, causes my heart to palpitate with excitement!

It overwhelms my mind to envision what it will be like—the saints of God being supplied an abundant entrance (see II Peter 1:11) into the heavenly realm! Can you imagine the ecstasy that shall pervade the hearts of the redeemed, marching through the portals of glory into the wonderful city of God???

And then shall the righteous shine! And they shall shine forever! In resplendent glory! *THINK OF IT! SHINING FOREVER IN RESPLENDENT GLORY!!!!*

“CHOOSIN' UP SIDES”

As kids, whenever we were going to have a game that involved team play, we always went through the ritual of “choosin' up sides.” The criteria for selection was generally twofold: (1) who was the best at whatever we were going to play, and (2) popularity. Grownup folks do the same sort of thing, though in a more sophisticated way. For example, the Professional Football League recently concluded its annual draft of collegiate players and this amounts to “choosin' up sides.” And in this day and age of computerized data, a wealth of information on each prospective player

was available to all the teams. The criteria for selecting is generally based on the following: size, speed, strength, intelligence, intensity, desire, attitude, and overall abilities. The ones that grade highest on a combination of these, are the ones that are selected as "high draft picks." Others with somewhat lesser portions of the same items, are not taken until the latter rounds and are called "lower draft picks." Many hopeful players are not chosen at all. They go into the "free-agent" category and must seek a position with a team that will give them a "try-out."

Musing over all this, the following popped into my mind—what if preachers in a given area could get together and have a "draft" to determine which members would be a part of each congregation? (Such is out of the question, I know, but hmmm!?!?)

Let's just suppose that a computer made exhaustive data available on each member. And the following criteria would be the basis for selection: Bible knowledge, spirituality, love for the Lord, dedication to His cause, desire to serve, willingness to expend time and effort, attitude, dependability, and all around faithfulness. Before the "draft" commenced, the preachers would carefully, "grade out" each prospective member.

Question—would *You* go "high" in the draft, or would you be a "low draft choice?" Or would you be selected at all? Would you have to settle for "free-agent" status?

Well, thankfully, it isn't going to be like that. "Choosin' up sides" is for kids and grown-up kids. But God knows "them that are his." II Timothy 2:19. The Lord will make the final choice of which ones will be on His "team" for eternity, or not. See Matthew 13:41-43 and Matthew 25:31-33. Before the Lord each ser-

vant will stand or fall. *Romans 14:4b*. Better give it profound consideration—Now!

THE CASE FOR INTOLERANCE

It is very fashionable these days to be quite tolerant of evil. Multitudes of people pride themselves in being broadminded toward every perverted and depraved manner of conduct imaginable. Notice, for example, over TV shows like the "Tonight" show, or the Arsenio Hall show, or the Dave Letterman show, how sinful things such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, drunkenness, etc. are the subjects of "jokes and fun," and the audience infers that anyone who would condemn such practices is an "old fogey" and "behind the times."

But regardless, the Bible still says, "Ye that love the Lord, *hate evil*." Psalms 97:10. It says, "*Abhor that which is evil*." Romans 12:9. And again, "*abstain from every form of evil*." I Thessalonians 5:22. And too, "*... resist the devil ...*" James 4:7b.

While Christians are taught to be tolerant of some things, evil is not one of them! Concerning it, we are to be most intolerant! Iniquity and evil are of the kingdom of darkness, and Satan's kingdom stands in stark contrast to the kingdom of our Lord, for His is the kingdom of light—of good, truth, and righteousness. The one is the antithesis of the other. Allegiance to Christ demands an attitude of hostility toward evil. To love the Lord is to hate evil!

Satan is the king of the abyss, the leader of the forces of wickedness, wearing the Greek name

Apollyon, which means "Destroyer!" See Revelation 9:11. As the "Destroyer," you can be assured that he seeks the spiritual ruination of us all. He is our avowed enemy and there is no changing that fact. Therefore, there can be no compromise with him! He must be resisted at all cost, with the utmost determination! It is a matter of eternal life or death!

This is the reason it is so painful to realize that many Christians have unwittingly imbibed the philosophy of tolerating evil from a spiritually bereft society. A lenient attitude toward false-ways and sin-in-general has permeated our ranks, and has lessened the distinctive stand for truth and right which once was the number one identifying characteristic of churches of Christ.

With the Bible telling us to hate evil, abhor evil, and abstain, from evil, it seems to me that this is a strong case for the *INTOLERANCE OF EVIL!* Our stand must be an unequivocal stand for God's Way! Nothing less than that will do.

"I WOULD PICK MORE DAISIES"

I recently read an article by, the above title, written by an 85 year old lady named Nadine Stair of Louisville, Kentucky. It was evidently written in response to the question, "What would you do if you had your life to live over?" Though there were things she said that we may or may not agree with, the "gist" of her philosophy was great. Giving her full credit for the "caption" and the idea, I would like to expound beyond the thrust of her article . . .

The basic outlook of "taking time to smell the roses" and "picking more daisies" as we journey along the pathway of life is positive, wholesome, and good! We need to accentuate the beauties of life! We need to "dwell on" the pluses! Our eyes need to see the pretty flowers, the green grasses, and the rolling hills, and our ears need to hear the sound of singing birds and laughing children!

Perhaps the greatest failing of us all is that we tend to magnify the negative and the bad things around us. The inclination is to major on the "uglier side" of life. We "dwell on" the minuses! Our eyes see the crime, the corruption, and the pollution. And our ears hear the announcing haunts of pessimism and the crying of heartache and ruin. And we often feel "pressed"—yea, crushed!—by the pressurized fast-moving, materialistic society we live in.

While there is yet time, each of us, needs to re-evaluate our individual approach to life. What we've done thus far is done. There is no re-living the past. But what about from this moment on? Let's really *think* about it—*reflect* and *ponder*. . .

As for me, I am resolving down deep in my heart to *always try* to look more on the bright side of things! I'm going to *try* to smile instead of frown! I'm going to *try* to be happy instead of "moping around!" I am going to spend more time looking *up* than down! I resolve to be more often glad than sad! The *abundant life* is promised me in Christ and I am determining to possess it to a fuller and more meaningful degree than in times past! (See John 10:10). "Joy" should permeate the heart of the Christian and I intend to start "rejoicing" more than ever before! See Philippians 4:4.

My Savior and His cause will be *first* in my life!

(See Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21, and Matthew 6:33) Heaven will be my *singular goal!* (See Matthew 6:19-22, I Peter 1:3-4, and Philippians 3:20-21). Thus, the abundant life will be mine, and joy and blessings immeasurable will fill my life—and from this day forward I intend to “smell the roses” and “pick more daisies!” I don't want any regrets of wasted years!

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER BALANCE

Jesus taught that the true worshippers of God must worship Him in “spirit and truth.” Please read *John 4:23-24*. Not “spirit” alone, or “truth” alone, but “spirit and truth.” To leave out either of these in worship of God would be to worship *in vain!*

Most all agree that worship in spirit means that one engages in expressions of praise and adoration to the Almighty one with reverence and awe, and with a humble and sincere attitude. Read *Luke 19:9-14* for insight concerning a proper spirit. To worship in truth means that one does so in compliance with the revealed will of God as recorded in the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. Read *Matthew 15:6-9* for insight concerning the importance of obeying the divine precepts and not supplanting His directives with the doctrines of men. Regardless of how sincere and “spiritual” a person might be, if he/she engages in worship of God while ignoring or rejecting God's truth pertaining to worship, such worship is vain. On the other hand, regardless of how careful one might be to do just those things commanded of God, if his/her

attitude is bitter, cynical, and devoid of humble and sincere devotion, such worship is vain!

This *principle* of *PROPER BALANCE* in the worship of God is applicable to many areas of the Christian's life. We need to remember that to allow one's self to become sidetracked from "center" generally causes some kind of a "crash" in the ditch on either side. "Extremism" is hurtful to the Cause of Christ.

As an example, let us consider some present happenings in the brotherhood: A significant number of brethren seem rather intent on disrupting the unity of the church by veering to the left and taking a course away from the "old paths." While many are at various "intervals" along this route, some have gone extremely far away, even ridiculing the very concept of a Divine pattern! It is my firm conviction that such is wrong! But on the other hand, in reaction to all this, some have allowed the pendulum to swing so far the other way that bitterness and cynicism dominate. This produces a "circle-drawing" mind set that ends up setting at naught any brother that disagrees with them at all. This posture, in my judgement, is just as wrong as the other. Both extremes only polarize brethren, and fragment the church.

We need to see the importance of proper balance! Let the "mainstream" of brethren cleave to truth with conviction and courage, and yet in love, understanding, and kindness. Let us continually plead for unity based on truth, and lovingly try to wield our influence to attain it. Let us be bridge builders and not bridge destroyers! Let us be peacemakers and not peacebreakers! See *Matthew 5:9*.

THE CHRISTIAN BELONGS TO GOD

During his perilous sea journey as recorded in *Acts 27*, the apostle Paul made reference to God, saying, "whose I am, and whom I serve." Verse 23. Earlier in his life, in giving instruction to Christians concerning proper moral conduct, he wrote "ye are not your own; for we were bought with a price; glorify God therefore in your body." *I Corinthians 6: 19-20*. And again, in his epistle to *Titus*, . . . he stated that Jesus Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." 2:14. And another apostle declared that the church is "A people for God's own possession. . . ." *I Peter 2:9*. Brethren, we need to realize this, in view of eternity, and act accordingly!

IN THE MIDST OF A PERVERSE WORLD

The apostle Paul urged Christians in his day and time to conduct themselves blamelessly, and "without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world" (*Phil. 2:15*). In view of this passage and what we know from secular history, there can be no doubt that a decadent moral climate prevailed throughout most all the Roman Empire when the Philippian letter was written. Righteous living on the part of faithful children of God was the only "light" to be seen in a society "darkened" by gross immorality.

Therefore, it was of vital importance that members of the Lord's church conduct themselves in an exemplary manner, not only to remain free from spiritual contamination themselves, but clearly show the heathen a better way of life! "Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord. . ." (*II Cor. 6:17*). "As he who called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living" (*I Pet. 1:15*). "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles. . ." (*I Pet. 2:11-12*).

In like manner, we too live in a time of decadence. It is revoltingly amazing how far away from God our society has gone. The ACLU and those of like ilk and stamp have largely succeeded in closing the doors of our schools to any mention of the Almighty and the Bible, while seeing to it that the children of this nation are taught atheistic evolution and the use of condoms. While their "bleeding hearts" do all that is possible to block the exaction of even the most sadistic killers, yet they do everything but "stand on their heads" FOR the right (?!?) of murdering nearly two million totally innocent unborn children every year! And while such as that is going on, illegal and life shattering drugs and alcohol inundate our land! Gambling is a \$50 billion dollar a year industry in America! Lewdness, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and all sorts of deviant sexual behaviour are rampant among so many. And such trash is paraded before the whole country on prime time TV in glamorous fashion in a concerted effort to gain approval and acceptance of all! AIDS is on the threshold of a major epidemic, pornography of varying extent is available in most all magazines! The home

as God would have it has been designated "a relic from the past" while countless children are tossed to and from "pillar to post" without the benefit and security of a mother *and* a father who love them and who are there for them during formative years. And in the midst of all this, it never seems to dawn on the media moguls what the real problems really are!

As was the need in the 1st century, the need NOW, in the last decade of the 20th century is even more pressing, for the "redeemed of the Lord" to say so (*Psalms 107:2*), not only through preaching and teaching the gospel, but in excellence of lifestyle! "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (*Matt. 5:16*).

THE CHALLENGE OF BEING POSITIVE

We live in trying times! so many negatives "nip at our heels" every day. Dozens of things seem to frustrate and discourage us at most every turn. All too frequently there are the pressures of getting bills paid, bearing responsibilities, and keeping commitments. And there generally are a few hyper-critics along the way with which we must cope, problematic situations with which we must deal, and obstacles in our pathway we must surmount. All of these combine to say, "it's not easy to be positive. . . it is a real challenge!" It would be much easier to succumb to the pressures, the disappointments, and the agitations, and become bitter and cynical.

But the Christian accepts the challenge of being positive because of his faith in God and His faithfulness to His children. The apostle Paul wrote, "But as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay . . . for how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea;; (*II Cor. 1:18, 20*) ! "The firm foundation of God standeth sure. . ." (*II Tim. 2:19*). Time and again the Bible assures us that "God is able" (*Eph. 3:20; II Cor. 9:8, etc.*), and that "God is faithful" (*I Cor. 10:13; Heb. 10:23, etc.*). Believing this without reservation, the Christian then has complete confidence that everything is going to "work out" OK (*Prov. 3:5-6; Rom. 8:28, etc.*). Thus, the Christian can be positive in a desperately negative world because of God's faithfulness and ability. As Paul declared, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content" (*Phil. 4:11*). This was indeed a positive outlook by this great man of God in difficult circumstances. We too need to accept the challenge of being positive regardless of what we face.

THE WHIRLWIND IS COMING !!!

The prophet Hosea (who did his work from about 750 to approximately 725 B.C.), indicted the sinful nation of his day with the succinct words: "Israel hath forgotten his Maker!" *Hosea 8:14*. Just prior to this, he had declared, "they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." Verse 7.

Tragically there is a striking similarity between then and now. Our nation too has forgotten God, the maker of all things. (Read *Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6*;

Nehemiah 9.6; Acts 17:24, et al.) Immorality of the rankest sort is rampant, lawlessness and crime are widespread, and the traffic in alcohol and drugs is appalling! People flaunt their sinful practices, and tread under foot things that should be viewed as sacred. Profane conduct has become so prevalent that the rest of society just tries to ignore it. But to no avail really, because how can you ignore indecency and obscenity when it is paraded before the public view on almost every hand!? We are now reaping the whirlwind of a deteriorating society.

In the "spirit of the prophets, I must cry aloud to those intent on treading under foot all decency and uprightness. *"Be not deceived, God is not mocked!* Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap; if a man soweth to the flesh, he shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap eternal life." *Galatians 6:7-8*. In the previous chapter, the inspired writer had enumerated the "works of the flesh," and said, "I warn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Verse 21.

There is coming a day of retribution! A day of giving an account! "God has appointed a day in which he will judge this world in righteousness by that man (the Christ) whom he hath ordained. . . ." *Acts 17:30*. Just as surely as certain is definite that day is coming! *The whirlwind of judgment is coming!* And by the multiplied millions, the vile and the wicked will try to hide themselves in the caves and will cry to the mountains and the rocks, "fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb," *Revelation 6:15-16*. But there will be no escape! And the lovers of the dark domain

will be banished from God's holy presence forever! Sad, sad, the bitter wail! There shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth!

THE LORD'S SUPPER

It would be well for everyone to read again the accounts in the New Testament of Jesus establishing the remembrance of His sacrifice to be observed by His true followers: *Matthew 26:26-29*; *Mark 14:22-25*; and *Luke 22:17-20*. And especially should we ponder anew the writings of the inspired apostle Paul in *I Corinthians 11:23-29*. Please give careful attention to verse 27: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." This cannot be taken lightly! We must realize that the partaking of the Lord's supper is a communion of the body and blood of Christ. (Read *I Corinthians 10:16-17*.)

Yet, on many occasions we've probably all observed carelessness and insensitively on the part of supposed worshippers during the observance of the supper, and all too often, even those who "wait on the table" and pass the emblems among the brethren are unthinking in attire and conduct. I've seen brethren serving the Lord's supper dressed in "slip-shod" fashion (this is particularly true among young men, sometime), and perhaps even chewing gum. (It was recently told me of a brother, serving at the table wearing a T-shirt with words blazoned across the front, saying, "Drink more Coors!" Such as that is

inexcusable! It is sinful, and shameful!) None would consider going to the funeral of a friend improperly attired, or in any way conducting himself other than most properly.

Remember, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." *Psalms 89:7 KJV*. And too, "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." *John 4:24*.

THE VOICE OF STRANGERS

Recently, that unspeakable horror which parents fear most almost happened to our granddaughter in East Texas. Rachael, 7 years of age, begged her Mom to let her ride around the block on her bicycle. She had planned to ride with some friends, but for one reason or another they couldn't go. Our daughter reluctantly consented, but with the usual precautions to be careful and come right back home. As she circled the block near the entrance way into their residential area, a man sitting in a car next to a tree-covered vacant lot told her to stop. Surprised, she did so, but became frightened as he tried to coax her to his car. Having been taught not to heed the voice of strangers, she dropped her bicycle and ran for home!. The man, of course, sped away. Law officials were contacted and a description of the vehicle and man were given from a child's memory. But it was plenty accurate enough for the officers to immediately recognize who she was talking about. . . a man they feel strongly is "up to no good" and has been seen several times trying to coax

children to his car. "But", they said, "until he actually commits a crime there is nothing we can do about it." It sends shivers down my spine to just think about it! But how thankful I am that Rachael did not listen to the voice of a stranger!

In the spiritual realm, the Bible clearly teaches the importance of listening to the true Shepherd, but just as plainly to NOT listen to the voice of "strangers!" Concerning Himself, the true Shepherd, the Lord says "the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. and a stranger will they *not* follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers" (*John 10:4-5*). It sends shivers down my spine to ponder the harm being done by the strange voices of "strangers" in the midst of the sheepfold (i.e., the church) today. Just like the apostle warned, "grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and men shall arise from among yourselves speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (*Acts 20:29-30*). Jesus warned about *false* Christs and *false* prophets that would try "to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (*Matt. 24:24*). Jesus told His disciples to NOT heed what they say! Note verse 26. the principle involved in our Lord's warning is just as applicable to us today as it was to the disciples who lived from the personal ministry of Christ until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Jesus said "If ye abide in my word, then are ye my disciples. . . if we don't abide in His word, then we are not His disciples. Therefore, it is of VITAL IMPORTANCE that we are very discerning in making sure we know the Shepherd's voice and heed it, while NOT listening to the voice of strangers!

WHO COMPOSES THE BROTHERHOOD?

By apostolic injunction, Christians are taught "to love the BROTHERHOOD" (*I Pet. 2:17*). To do so genuinely and sincerely is one of the proofs that our lives are right with God: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (*I John 3:14*). To have a heart filled with love for God (*I John 4:19 Matt. 22:37*), and for our brothers and sisters in Christ (*I Pet. 1:22; Rom. 12:10*, etc.), is just as natural as can be for the truly converted.

But a legitimate question arises. . . exactly who are my spiritual kinsmen? Who composes "the brotherhood" of Christ? Is it not reasonable to be instructed by the guidelines from Jesus Himself in seeking to know exactly who our spiritual brothers and sisters are because **OBVIOUSLY NOT** everyone is a spiritual kinsman? Certainly unbelievers would **NOT** be: Jesus taught that those who do not believe stand condemned (Read *John 3:18; 8:24; Mark 16:16*, etc.) Just think of how many multiplied millions of people are either atheists, agnostics, or adherents of religions that **DO NOT BELIEVE** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. . . the Jews, the Hindus, the Shintos, the Buddhists, the Confucianists, the Mohammedans, etc. By no stretch of the imagination could they be classified as "spiritually related" to members of the Lord's church. Neither can we consider those our spiritual kinsmen who through obstinate rebellion, or ignorance of His word, do not submit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus. Note what He Said: "Not everyone who saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter

into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (*Matt. 7:21*). And again, in a context in which the subject is the very thing this article pertains to, Jesus identified His spiritual relations by saying, "whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (*Matt. 12:50*). The Father has made His will known through revelation. . . "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God. . ." (*II Tim. 3:16*). And the Father wills that we hear His Son (*Matt. 17:5* and *Heb. 1:1-2*), to whom He has given "all authority" (*Matt. 28:18* and *Eph. 1:22-23*), and who saves those who "obey him" (*Heb. 5:9*). Thus, those who worship according to the doctrines of men do so in vain according to what the Lord Himself said in *Matt. 15:9*. He asked, "why do ye call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (*Luke 6:46*)?

In conclusion, those who compose the true BROTHERHOOD of Christ are the ones who believe with all their hearts that He is the only begotten son of God, who love Him as their Savior, humbly obeying His gospel, and who live their lives submissively to Him as Lord. They are members of His spiritual body, which is the church. They are children of God, citizens of the kingdom of heaven. They are Christians. . . people who are loving, kind, compassionate, gentle, forgiving, serving, and yet who are courageously resolute in standing for right and truth and against wrong and error. They "walk in the light as He is in the light" (*I John 1:7*), and do their best to be faithful unto Him in all things in light of His word.

BE THANKFUL

Prior to their conversion, the people who composed the church of the Lord in Ephesus, had been engulfed in sin, and were spiritually dead. But God in His grace, mercy, and love, had saved them from sin and brought them back to life, spiritually. Read *Ephesians 2:1-13*. This saving, and the giving of life was obviously predicated upon their faith and obedience. How thankful Christians should be!

NONE SO BLIND AS HE WHO WILL NOT SEE

One of the most interesting incidents in the life of our Lord is recorded in *John 9*. What a notable deed was done! Jesus gave sight to a man born blind, and His enemies, the Pharisees, "were fit to be tied!" They wanted so badly to discredit what Christ had done, so they questioned the man's parents, and the man himself, hoping somehow to find an avenue of attack. In their second round of interrogation of the now "seeing" man, the Pharisees said, "we know this man (i.e., reference to Jesus) is a sinner," attempting to turn him against the Lord. But the man replied, "whether he is a sinner, I know not; one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (*John 9:25*)! From birth, this man had been unable to see, but through the power of Jesus his eyes were opened! A tremendous miracle!

But the Pharisees, though they possessed the physical attribute of vision, were BLIND spiritually.

Jesus indicted them with these scathing words quoted from the prophet Isaiah: "hearing ye shall hear, and shall in no wise understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall in no wise perceive. for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should turn again, and I should heal them" (*Matt. 13:14-15*). These people were "blind" (i.e., spiritually) by choice! As incredible as that might seem, it is nonetheless true.

It brings to mind the old saying, "there is none so blind as he who will not see!" But tragically and regrettably, how well that describes multitudes today. Millions and millions of people are willingly duped by false teachers. Those who have "turned their ears away from the truth, and have turned aside unto fables" (*II Tim. 4:4*). Because they have not a love for the truth, God sends them "a strong delusion that they should believe a lie" (*II Thess. 2:11*).

Countless masses reject the simplicity of the gospel. . . that salvation is only in Christ, that there is but one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one church (see *John 14:6*; *II Tim. 2:10*; *Eph. 4:4-5*, and *1:22-23*), and go chasing after every kind of "far-out" and preposterous philosophy and doctrine imaginable. Truly, "there is none so blind as he who will not see!"

FOR OUR GOOD ALWAYS

Are you among many people who have a misconception of God's directives for our lives? A lot of

folks seem to think that Bible commands are simply arbitrary and legalistic rules to be imposed upon them by some preacher, and are of no real benefit to their lives.

For our reflection, may I call to your attention a verse of Scriptures from the Old Testament?. In rehearsing God's law for His people before the nation of Israel, Moses said, "And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, *for our good always. . .*" *Deuteronomy 6:24*. Obviously, what God told the Israelites to do was for their own good!

It is my conviction that if people today could understand that one point, it would help tremendously. as the Old Covenant law to Israel was "righteous, and good," and "unto life," (*Romans 7:12, 10*), in like manner the law of Christ is good, true, and unto life. Jesus came from the Father that we "may have life, and may have it abundantly." *John 10:10*. He is "*the way!*" *John 14:6*.

But for any human being to be in His way, it necessitates obedience to His commandments. "He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whosoever keepeth his word, in him verily hath the love of God been perfected." *I John 4:4-5*. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." *I John 5:3*. Obviously, God intended them for "our good always!" Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him! *Hebrews 5:9*.

THE INCREDIBLE LOSS!

During the reign of Josiah, the 16th king of Judah (approximately 640 to 609 B.C.), the high priest, Hilkiah, made a startling discovery, exclaiming, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." II Kings 22:8. Obviously, in order for the "book of the law" to be found, it had first to be lost. As unthinkable as it is, apparently God's people had lost His law to them right there is His house! An incredible loss indeed!

Josiah, a man who wanted to do what was right (see verse 2), and realizing that God's displeasure was kindled against them "because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us," inquired concerning God's feelings in the matter (verses 13-20). The very next scenario is that of all the people being gathered together at the temple, and the king reading "in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord." Chapter 23:1-2.

What a tremendous lesson in this for us today! Equally incredible and unthinkable as it is, some brethren through neglect of, or disregard to basic New Testament doctrine, are doing a pretty good job of "losing the book" (in this case, the New covenant) in the midst of God's spiritual house, which is the church. (I Peter 2:5, and I Timothy 3:15). The brotherhood needs to be clearly reminded that "whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God, but whosoever abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the son." II John 9. Remember, "all scripture is given by

the inspiration of God. . ." II Timothy 3:16. God has spoken, and He means what He said!

It is observed that "history repeats itself." As God's will got "lost in the shuffle" of men's philosophies and dogmas in the past, necessitating a "search for the ancient order," I humbly ask my brethren of today, "will the next generation have to find the Book we lost?"

God is not held in reverence among us if His will is viewed with nonchalance and less than profound respect. Throughout the brotherhood there **MUST BE** a renewed, deep-seated regard for "thus saith the Lord," or we will all rue the day we allowed His book to be lost!

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

Our lamented brother Tillit S. Teddlie wrote, "Swiftly we're turning life's daily pages, swiftly the hours are changing to years; how are we using God's golden moments. . . shall we reap glory, or shall we reap tears?" How provocative!

I often wonder what many people are thinking about when their lives are so carelessly conducted, without any apparent concern for their spiritual well-being. Don't they care about where they will spend eternity?", I ponder.

Of all God's creatures, the human being is the only one endowed with the capacity to understand and to realize weighty matters. As a prime example, each of us knows that death is coming. The wise man wrote, "the living know that they will die"

(*Ecclesiastes 9:5*). It is cruel irony, then, that knowing this, such little preparation is made for it, especially in view of the judgment which is coming: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (*Heb. 9:27*).

God, in His incomprehensible love and mercy, "would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (*II Tim. 2:4*). NOW is the time of salvation! (*II Cor. 6:2*). Through Jesus Christ, He has provided salvation for all people, but it is up to each individual to either accept or reject the gospel. To those who accept the message through faith and obedience, and who live in accordance with His will, salvation. But those who either reject or neglect the great salvation He has provided, they will incur His wrath. (*II Thess. 1:8-9* and *Heb. 2:3*) **THINK ABOUT IT**, in view of eternity!

THE DANGER OF FORGETTING GOD

Shortly before the children of Israel crossed the Jordan to possess the promised land, Moses rehearsed God's law with them, and warned them to "forget not the Lord thy God" (*Deuteronomy 8:11*). Obviously, there was a very real danger that such would happen or else there would have been no warning.

In like manner, God's people of today need to be warned to NOT forget God. If it were not a possibility there would be no need for the warning. But there is a need to remind Christians. . . don't forget God:

(1) *In the home*: some Christians "go to church" in pious fashion but forget all about God and His will in family relationships. Mental, emotional, and even physical abuses are regretfully, sometimes reality, even in "Christian" homes. (2) *In the workplace*: Again, many members of the church seem so mindful of God at the place of assembly, but forget about Him when on the job. This is evidenced whenever bad language, dirty jokes, and such like pass the lips, or social drinking, or gambling, or flirtatious passes are engaged in. (3) *On vacation*: Many, many times, when Christians "go on vacation," God is forgotten. This is manifested in "skipping the assembly," in immodest dress, or in going to places and doing things not appropriate for Christians.

Let us note the continued warning of Moses: "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God. . . I testify against you this day that day that ye shall surely perish" (*Deut. 8:19*). Thus, I pray we will remember how terribly consequential it is to forget God: A day of "giving an account" is coming! (*II Cor. 5:10* and *Rom. 14:12*).

STAN ATTACKS THE BIBLE

"The deceiver of the whole world" (i.e., Satan, *Rev, 12:9*), the one who is "the father of lies" (*John 8:44*), has employed every cunning device to

undermine and attack the Bible through the years. The devil is relentless in so doing because he knows "the crux of the whole matter" revolves around how people view the Scriptures.

Satan, through false teachers, has convinced millions that there is no absolute standard of truth. What our forefathers understood to be either black or white has in recent times been painted gray. People are told there are not clearly defined lines of right and wrong, Morality, and religious doctrine also, have been related in the minds of most to a "gray zone" of relativity. People believe what they want to believe and do what they want to do. It is as in the days of the Judges when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". (*Judges 17:6*).

The tragedy is that so many gullibly swallow Satan's deceiving poison through his pawns that feed it to them. Thus, they are without a spiritual anchor, being tossed to and fro on perilous seas, and battered from reef to reef of doctrinal untruths. They drift into deep and dangerous waters of doubt and skepticism. They walk in the darkness, though having been deluded by Satan into thinking that they have greater spiritual insight. How sad!

To all who will listen I cry out, **THERE IS A STANDARD OF TRUTH GIVEN OF GOD - - - THE BIBLE IS HIS WORD!** (*See II Tim. 3:16-17*). And the word of the Lord will judge all men in the last day! (*John 12:48*). You had better believe it because it is so!

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY

There is a cute song that we teach small children, the words of which warn, "O be careful little hands what you do. . . and, be careful little feet where you go. . . and be careful little eyes what you see. . . there's a Father up above, looking down in tender love, etc." Most of us remember that song. One of the stanzas concerns the tongue; "O be careful little tongue what *you say!*" A whole bunch of adults would do well to heed that verse!

Jesus, the Master Teacher, taught the importance of the proper use of the tongue: ". . . for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. the good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things; and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. and I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall given account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." *Matt. 12:34-37*. This great teaching, coming from our Lord to whom we shall give an account of our lives someday (*John 12:48; II Cor. 5:10*), should surely get our attention!

Why is it, in spite of this plain teaching of Jesus, that many people go right ahead in using vile, and obscene language? And many, many people use God's name in vain as if it were so much trash! But they had better remember His warning in the decalogue: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." *Exodus 20:7*.

I have never understood why anyone would want to use bad language. It is certainly totally unnecessary to expressing oneself. and to say the least, it is in poor taste, and is generally very offensive to others present. In fact, it is sickening to God-fearing people who unfortunately happen to be in a situation where someone is so uncouth as to curse. But the most important thing for those who do this, is *to know that it is a sin*, and **“the wages of sin is death!” Rom. 6:23.**

SOLOMON'S SAGE ADVICE

Oftentimes we refer to Solomon as the “wise man.” And that is indeed an apt description for his sayings, and writings. He asked God for “an understanding heart” and God gave it to him. Read *I Kings 3:6-12*. Undoubtedly, the spirit of God directed him by inspiration's hand to record things which God wanted all men to know.

Therefore, we should take heed to this sage advice he gave in the long ago: “Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on” (*Proverbs 4:14-15*, NKJV). And again, “he that pursues evil pursues it to his own death” (*Proverbs 11.19*).

In this day and age of permissiveness, when iniquity abounds at every turn it seems, those that would be right with God and who desire heaven as their home, **MUST BE EXTREMELY CAREFUL** to

NOT BE DECEIVED and enticed into sinful practices. You can be assured Satan is going to do his best to tempt and allure people away from God... and Christians are his #1 target! Satan already has the people of the world exactly where he wants them, so he employs his cunning skills to seduce God's people! This fact promoted the apostle Paul to admonish the church in Corinth to do what was right "that no advantage may be gained over us *by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his devices*" (*II Corinthians 2:11*). and quoting from the Psalms, the apostle Peter exhorted Christians with these words: "He that would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they speak no guile: let him turn away from evil and do good" (*I Pet. 3:10*).

BELIEVING 'HEARSAY'

There are many people in this world who seem to thrive on "hearsay." Some one tells them something and they believe it "hook, line, and sinker" without seeking to "get the facts." No matter how preposterous it might be, or how untrue, or how hurtful to another, the ready ear believes malicious gossip because it delights in such. Seldom do most do any checking as to the validity of "tales" they hear, but instead, most often pass it on as factual to someone else!

To illustrate how far afield this kind of thing can take folks, allow me to relate a humorous story: It seems one man walked up to another and said, "I heard you made a million dollars in Texas oil." The

reply was, "Well, the story has some substance, but needs considerable adjustment to make it really accurate. First of all, it was in Oklahoma and not Texas. And it wasn't oil, but gas. And it wasn't me, but my brother-in-law. And it wasn't million dollars, but a hundred thousand. And he didn't make it, he lost it!" Yes, the story had but the slightest semblance of substance, but not much to say the least! But it serves to show us how things can be misconstrued and distorted.

This same type thing takes place in the religious world. Let someone come along with some crazy teaching that has not the remotest kinship to truth, you can be assured that there will be those who will believe it. They seem never to ponder, "Is it true? Is it what God's word teaches?" So many never even read the Bible, much less study it to see what it teaches. Thus, their religious beliefs and conclusions have but little Biblical substance, if any all. All the facts have somehow gotten "all mixed-up" along the way.

The inspired penman, Luke, commended the people in Berea because "they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so" (*Acts 17:11*). Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone would do exactly the same thing today?

WASHED IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

In seeing his vision of the heavenly hosts, the

apostle John inquired as to who they were and where they came from? One of the elders responded to him: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." *Revelation 7:13-14*.

Isn't that a beautiful thought? Washed and made clean through the precious blood of Jesus - - - He being the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. *John 1:29-36*. The Lamb without blemish and without spot purchased us back from the "clutches of Satan" with His own precious blood! *I Peter 1:18-19*.

The Bible teaches us that Christians are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood." *Romans 3:24-25*. The word "propitiation" literally means "to appease," and is very similar in connotation to the words, "expiation" and "atonement." They all carry the idea of giving "satisfactory reparation for an offense or injury; the making of amends: the act of bringing into concord; the paying of the penalty due to sin, that restoration of right relations might be obtained."

Jesus did something for us that we could not do for ourselves! He paid for us a debt we could not pay! He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself! *Hebrews 9:26*. Thus, the Scriptures declare we have FORGIVENESS OF SINS THROUGH HIS BLOOD. *Ephesians 1:7* and *Colossians 1:14*. And Christians, who walk in the light with Him, are continually cleansed from all sin by His blood! *I John 1:7, 9*.

Furthermore, we are sanctified by His blood. *Hebrews 13:12*. Our consciences are cleansed through His blood. *Hebrews 9:14*. We are brought near to God

through His blood. *Ephesians 2:13*. We have peace with God through the blood of His cross! *Colossians 1:19-20*.

No wonder we sing, "AMAZING GRACE!" No wonder we should rejoice and be glad! No wonder we should praise God, and be forever grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ. He paid it all that we might live.