WRITINGS OF S FRANKLIN LOGSDON

by S. Franklin Logsdon

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by S. Franklin Logsdon, compiled for study and devotional reading.

114 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01.00.1 CRUCIFIED TO LIVE
2. 01.00.5 Foreward
3. 01.00.6 Introduction
4. 01.01 Paul Crucified To Live
5. 01.02 Paul's Vision Vitalized
6. 01.03 Paul Was A Christian
7. 01.04 Paul Salutes A New Captain
8. 01.05 Paul's Keynote At Corinth
9. 01.06 Paul's Belief In The Blessed Hope
10. 01.07 Paul And Prevailing Prayer
11. 01.08 Paul's Persistent Persuasion
12. 01.09 Paul's Pastoral Prescription
13. 01.10 Paul Tutors Titus
14. 01.11 Paul Promotes His Protege
15. 01.12 Paul's Perilous Euroclydon
16. 01.13 Paul Decries Satanic Chicanery
17. 01.14 Paul Found Fellowship
18. 01.15 Paul And The Parental Hearth
19. 01.16 Paul And The Matter Of Missions
20. 01.17 Paul's Intriguing Travelogue
21. 01.18 Paul's Forceful Finalies
22. 01.19 The Trellis Of Paul's Autobiography
23. 02.00.1 HOSEA, People Who Forgot GOD
24. 02.00.2 e-Sword Preface
25. 02.00.3 Table Of Contents
26. 02.00.4 Introduction
27. 02.01 The Divine Diagnosis
28. 02.02 The Symbol Of An Unfaithful Wife
29. 02.03 The Strain Upon Divine Patience
30. 02.04 The Interlude Of Love
31. 02.05 The Controversy Of The Lord
32. 02.06 The Day Of Rebuke
33. 02.07 The Horrible Discovery
34. 02.08 The Heartlessness Of The People
35. 02.09 The Ultimate Of Forgetfulness
36. 02.10 The Superficial Joy Of The People
37. 02.11 The Vine That Withered
38. 02.12 The Reminiscence Of The Lord
39. 02.13 The Balances Of Deceit

40. 02.14 The Epitaph Of Self-Destruction
41. 02.15 Prophetic Glimpses Of Recovery
42. 02.16 The Remedy And Ultimate Recovery
43. 03.00.1 LEST YE FAINT
44. 03.00.2 e-Sword Preface
45. 03.00.3 Table Of Contents
46. 03.00.4 Dedication
47. 03.00.5 Foreward
48. 03.00.6 Introduction
49. 03.01 The Complete Breakdown Of Faith
50. 03.02 Behind The Scene In The Prodigal's Life
51. 03.03 The Stranger In The Temple
52. 03.04 The Secret Of Continual Triumph
53. 03.05 The Stratosphere Of Spiritual Longing
54. 03.06 The Distinctive Divine Differentiation
55. 03.07 The Repeated Request For Revival
56. 03.08 The Effective Antidote For Apathy
57. 03.09 Curbing The Tide Of Unbelief
58. 03.10 The Further Appeal To Fellow-Workers
59. 03.11 The Siamese Twins Of Spiritual Prowess
60. 03.12 The Danger Of Disqualification
61. 03.13 Purpose Glorified
62. 04.00.1 Malachi, or Will A Man Rob God?
63. 04.00.2 e-Sword Preface
64. 04.00.3 Table Of Contents
65. 04.00.4 Prologue
66. 04.01 The Lord God's Love Questioned
67. 04.02 The Lord God's Name Disesteemed
68. 04.03 The Lord God's Worship Corrupted
69. 04.04 The Lord God's Entreaty Refused
70. 04.05 The Lord God's Treasury Robbed
71. 04.06 The Lord God's Sovereignty Denied
72. 04.07 The Three Tenses Of The Lord's Sovereignty
73. 04.08 Messiah's Coming Ignored
74. 05.00.1-THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK
75. 05.00.2- Preface to the-Sword Edition
76. 05.00.3- Copyright Information
77. 05.00.4- Table of Contents
78. 05.00.5- Preface
79. 05.01- CHAPTER ONE -- THE SPIRIT CAME TO MEN
80. 05.02- CHAPTER TWO -- THE SPIRIT GLORIFIES THE SON
81. 05.03- CHAPTER THREE -- THE SPIRIT BAPTIZES...

82. 05.04- CHAPTER FOUR -- THE SPIRIT INDWELLS...
83. 05.05- CHAPTER FIVE -- THE SPIRIT WORKS...
84. 05.06- CHAPTER SIX -- THE SPIRIT GUIDES...
85. 05.07- CHAPTER SEVEN -- THE SPIRIT GIVES...
86. 05.08- CHAPTER EIGHT -- THE SPIRIT PROVIDES...
87. 05.09- CHAPTER NINE -- SPIRIT FLOWS THROUGH...
88. 05.10- CHAPTER TEN -- THE SPIRIT OPERATES...
89. 05.11- CHAPTER ELEVEN -- THE SPIRIT WALKS WITH...
90. 05.12- CHAPTER TWELVE -- THE SPIRIT CONVINCES...
91. 05.13- CHAPTER THIRTEEN -- THE SPIRIT ENLARGES...
92. 05.14- CHAPTER FOURTEEN -- THE SPIRIT KNOWS...
93. 05.15- CHAPTER FIFTEEN -- THE SPIRIT POSES...
94. 05.16- CHAPTER SIXTEEN -- THE SPIRIT AND THE ONE...
95. 05.17- CHAPTER SEVENTEEN -- THE SPIRIT UNKNOWN TO MANY
96. 06.00.1 The Victory Life in Psalm 119
97. 06.00.2 e-Sword Preface
98. 06.00.3 Table Of Contents
99. 06.00.4 Preface
100. 06.01. The New Horizon
101. 06.02. The Shadow Of Doubt
102. 06.03. Hope Lies In The Skies
103. 06.04. Grounded
104. 06.05. The Cry Of Desperation
105. 06.06. Better Days Anticipated
106. 06.07. Spiritual Assets
107. 06.08. The Transforming Vision
108. 06.09. Advancement Through Adversity
109. 06.10. The Foundation Of Faith
110. 06.11. Snares Discovered
111. 06.12. Assurance At Its Best
112. 06.13. Love's Enduring Object
113. 06.14. The Floodlighted Pathway
114. 06.15. The Zenith Of Security

01.00.1 CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE “I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live” (Paul)

by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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01.00.5 Foreward

FOREWORD

Some months ago I had the blessed privilege of reading in manuscript some of the chapters of this volume, and I was exceedingly glad to know they would appear in book form. Now the book has been produced, and through its pages, by the Grace of God, many will be blessed.

In his own life the author has proved the blessed meaning of the Divine paradox that forms the title, which we each must prove for ourselves if we would walk the Pauline way. From the day of his conversion, Paul becomes the greatest Christian warrior who ever buckled on sword for the Lord and assaulted the citadel of Mansoul for Christ. He has left us an example that we might follow in his steps.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live.”

“This is a great mystery even to myself,” says Paul, “but I tell you how it has been fulfilled in me. When the law of God came home to me I saw that I was a dead man. I saw that the wages of sin like mine was death. But just then it was that God in His grace to me revealed His Son in me. Revealed Him in me a very mystery of godliness; revealed Him as made sin, as crucified for sin, and thus as the ransom and Redeemer of my soul. Had I died for my own sin, which I was just about to do, I had died forever: I had died the first and the second death. But dying in and with Christ, I both died and yet lived. One with Him in His death, I began to live in His resurrection life. I awoke and, after the Cross, found myself a new creature; old things had passed away, and all things had become new. I am dead to some things-dead and never to see resurrection. I am dead to the law and the law is dead to me. The law sometimes looks at me as if it knew me and had something against me, and was about to bring up something against me; but after a time it looks at me and passes me by.

“At such moments I tremble to my very heart; but at such moments God again reveals His Son in me, and I am enabled to say: ‘Why are thou disquieted in me, O my soul? thou and I are crucified with Christ.’”

There is a tremendous challenge to every reader in these pages. Mr. Logsdon has penetrated “far ben” into the Divine mysteries of the life that is life indeed and to be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. He lures us to brighter worlds and greater conquests and leads the way. I am proud and privileged to write this brief foreword to a book that needs no poor commendation of mine.

J. H. HUNTER Editor, The Evangelical Christian

01.00.6 Introduction

INTRODUCTION

It was with Holy Spirit unction that the beloved Apostle Paul encouraged men to emulate his life. “Be ye followers of me,” was his unhesitating advice. Down through the corridors of time, his appeal has come with a resounding challenge; and, in this day of alarming spiritual decline, it becomes eminently essential that the earnest child of God should hear anew the clarion call to a life of triumph through self-abandonment to his sovereign Lord.

The plea to emulate Paul in no wise contradicts or even affects the exhortation to “keep looking unto Jesus.” Instead of supplanting, it supplements. It is as though the Spirit of God were saying, “As you keep looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, you may find in Paul a profitable example of unswerving fidelity, unaffected devotion and unfailing obedience.” The practicality of the gospel became personified in him; and, as we peruse his walk and work, we become confident that his counsel is free of egotism and full of spiritual encouragement.

It is inspiring to learn how a “chosen vessel” became so definitely “sanctified and meet for the master’s use.”

- Travel with him down the path of the precious Page and you will find him in step with the Saviour.

- Sit under his persuasive preaching and you will know he declared the full counsel of God.

- Join with him in heavenly sweet communion and you will sense his nearness to Christ.

- Witness him enduring the vicious maltreatment of lewd men of the baser sort and you will understand that he had fellowship in the sufferings of his Lord.

- Walk with him down the last mile of his life’s journey and you will be aware of his unshatterable assurance in the protection of Providence.

To study his life is to throw widely open to our view the panoramic possibilities for all Christians of any age. “By the grace of God, I am what I am,” he contended; and this matchless, marvelous power is as presently sufficient as it was historically experienced by the trustworthy Apostle of early times. He clearly and firmly believed that he was called of God expressly “to reveal His Son in me” (Galatians 1:16).

During those three silent years in Arabia and in Damascus, subsequent to his conversion, his whole course seemed to be definitely determined and his unwavering aim was to reflect the life of Christ, Whose he was and Whom he served.

The papers herein presented were written solely with the thought in mind of setting forth some-thing of an unfolding of Paul’s holy desire to conscientiously exalt Christ, whether by life or by death.

This dear old champion of the early Church has been an unceasing challenge. He has stirred up a desire in the hearts of countless Christians to “glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “to fight the good fight of faith.”

May the sweet inspiration of his noble life fall as a mantle upon the soldiers of the cross who, in our day and in the days to come face the same vicious foe and serve the same ever-glorious Lord.

01.01 Paul Crucified To Live

CHAPTER ONE PAUL CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live” (Galatians 2:20)

Here, an ocean of sublimity, embraced within the eddy of a human heart, was finding an inspired release to flow iridescently in the unfailing stream of divine illumination. It was a terse and telling testimony, prayerful, premeditated and without precedence in the whole purview of Scripture. It was either the ranting of a lunatic or the voice of a victor. It was either the expression of an empty dream or the revelation of an extraordinary experience. But Paul was not the proclamator of fantastic melodrama or the author of misleading pronouncements. His were the utterances of carefully studied exactness and the statements of undying veracity.

A fictitious lad of literature may fix his eyes upon the face of stone and acquire its likeness; an imitating schoolboy may emulate his idealistic hero, but Paul must keep looking unto Jesus Who endured the cross. Calvary was ever a magnetic force upon the responses of his heart; and, in his musings, he blessed the day the crimson flow flooded this drab and dreary world with the Water of Life. He must never glory save in the cross-that glorious theme of present blessing and future hope. He would pray God to forbid any extraneous thoughts from affecting a wholehearted concentration upon the source of his unspeakable joy. Perishing souls may, through diabolical delusion, speak disparagingly of the cross and wag their heads in derision, but Paul perceived in it a power both transforming and elevating.

The light rays which stream from Calvary are of high potential effect: and anyone, who submits to these infra-currents, is built up in that most holy faith.

It was this influent tide which Paul found to be dross-refining, pride-consuming, spirit-lifting and faith-promoting. There is no sleaziness about the texture of Truth, and where else does it have a better display of forcefulness than in the cross?

- One look at the cross and this new creature in Christ sensed that he had been chief of sinners.

- One look at the cross, and this preeminent representative of the Christian faith lost sight of self and placed his own rating at the bottom of the apostolic roster.

- One look at the cross and this vilified but valiant servant knew he would wear a crown of glory.

The simplicity of his diction in so profound a matter is joyfully overwhelming.

What would require libraries, involve deep theories and endless explanations for us to set forth, this trophy of divine grace in early times presented in eight simple, well-chosen words: “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live . . .”

There it is, as fresh as the dew upon the roses, a thread from the soul of a chosen vessel, now woven into the fabric of the sacred volume.

- It is personal as a testimony for it attests the work of Christ upon a fallen son of Adam.

- It is an open confession, to be read and known of all men, that Saul of Tarsus died when he came face to face with Jesus of Nazareth; and, in his stead, there is now a man possessing the nature of God, indwelt by the Spirit and dominated by Christ his Lord.

- It is profound as a truth for it treats of the miraculous.

Categorically, it falls in the realm of mystery. No one was more conscious of this fact than the Apostle, but his confidence reposed in Him who doeth exceeding abundantly. If the Athenian culturists or Greek artists questioned the logic of his assertions, he merely explained, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit.”

- It is also precious as a tenet of faith for it is exclusive as a Christian precept, unique as a doctrine, singular in its glorious display of divine operation.

- It is acutely contrary to sacerdotal developments and vibrant in its ascription of glory to Him who alone is rightly worthy.

- It was infinitely more than the shibboleth of a warrior, or the motto of a moralist, or the platform of an aspirant.

- It was the Magna Charta of a triumphant soul which found abundant life through abasing death.

The Author of Faith evidenced His favour by breathing the testimony into the living words of His own lasting record, there to stir and to stimulate countless men and women in every succeeding era.

Even today, it towers as the loftiest peak of Alpine desire in the hearts of devoted followers of the Lord Christ, glistening in the smile of Providential approval and looming in the brightness of Holy Ghost appeal. The paradox of his revelation is amazingly marvellous. “I am crucified . . . I live.”

Paul was literally averring that he died to live, and his statement is by no means a confusion of words.

- It is not the light of a mental star plunged into the nebulous state of dementia.

- It is not the fragments of hallucinations.

- It is not the fomentation of a fanatic.

- It is not a theoretical fantasy produced by faulty reasoning.

- It is not the backwash of illiterate babbling.

- It is not the empty echo of a vacuous experience.

It is a positive, heaven-approved, spirit-propagated, time-honoured declaration which has lost none of its luster in two millennia of constant shining. It is accepted as truth by all trustworthy students of Scripture and often designated a paradox. But is it?

The so-called paradoxes of the Bible are multiple.

- One loses one's life to find it.

- One gives away to have.

- One is exalted by being abased.

- One is first by being last.

- One dies to live.

An assertion or sentiment seemingly contradictory, or opposed to common sense, is said to be a paradox. This, indirectly, is a strong support for the inspiration of the Scriptures. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," saith the Lord, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

A paradox in Scripture, then, is a satisfying proof of the transcendence of Divine thought above the scope of human intellectuality.

The seeming paradox of Paul's immortal pronouncement becomes a sound premise for Christian doctrine when once we see the basic truth involved. When Christ died, Paul died; because Christ lived, Paul lived.

The very moment that fact was grasped by faith, he found the reality of a new status. He had apprehended that for which he was apprehended. It was not the ultimate in Christian development, but it was the advancement in grace which made Christ the operating force in his life, the joy of his deepest emotions, the fascination of his every thought, and the comfort of his soul. There was now a new and an abiding consciousness of the Divine Presence, so real that he reckoned the self-life to have become non-existent. He lived, yet it was not he. The Lord Jesus had been given the privilege of occupation and lived through him. Instead of a paradox, it is a paramount precept of infinite purpose and the paragon of Christian pursuance. The clarity of his understanding is sweetly inspirational. It requires the keenest spiritual perception to properly appraise an inward work of the Spirit, and it necessitates the most careful employment of terminology to rightly express that appraisal.

Paul never interpreted a personal matter in the light of another's experience. When his course toward Damascus was suddenly interrupted by the Saviour, he did not seek an opportunity to compare notes with the Christians at Jerusalem. He perceived he had met the Lord and addressed Him as such without hesitance. He sensed the situation on the ship in the Mediterranean storm, and sought to advise the terror-stricken crew. He accurately viewed the condition on Mars' Hill and volunteered enlightenment for the ultra-religious leaders who had so sadly missed the mark.

He became quickly aware of the insurgence of error among the Galatians and required of them an explanation. He rightly judged the sad estate of the enemies of the cross and wept because of their eventual destruction. But he reached the apex of fine discernment when he confidently affirmed, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live."

There was no violent struggle for enunciatory powers; there was no search for technical terms or theological expressions; there was nothing Platonic or platitudinous about his statement. Without

verbosity or ambiguity, he publicly proclaimed what was privately possessed. He merely voiced what was verily the case.

At once, the message pierced and penetrated the hearts of men. It forged through the mysterious mists of futurity, as a meteor cutting the inkiness of the midnight sky with its train of fire, and, today, it strikes the souls of Christians with the force of atomic power. No utterance from his lips, no thought that was born of his mind, no expressed emotion of his soul has become more widely known, more generally memorized, more universally appealing to the warmhearted and devoted Christian than Galatians, two, twenty. It has changed the pulpit, challenged the pew and charmed the pupil. It is the coveted motto of countless young people and the constant inspiration of nameless pilgrims, who, with Paul, press toward the mark of the high calling of God.

The positiveness of his assertion is decidedly irrefutable. Competent testimony of a trustworthy person is not easily gainsaid.

- Adverse comment could not cripple his confession;

- Cruel taunts by treacherous tricksters could not tear into the timber of its truth;

- Skeptical antipathy could not inundate its permanence;

- Vicious satanic thrusts could not invalidate its veracity;

- Subtle and sinister counterfeits could not dim its luster;

- Nor could the grossly incredulous successfully question its profundity.

There was something definite about his assertion. It related to himself, though applicable to all, and he was well aware of its involvements. He, consequently, could speak with the greatest convincing certainty.

- It was he who was crucified with Christ.

- It was he who lived with Christ.

- It was he who walked by the faith of the Son of God.

Until another has so died and so lives, let him keep silence. Like John, the great Apostle could say, “I speak that which I know and testify that which I have seen.”

Then, there was something decisive about his statement.

Certain death and positive life are matters of undiminishable importance. To lend weight and provide emphasis, Paul used the two most antithetical terms as affecting humankind.

He not only spoke about death and life, but about the worst form of death (crucifixion) and the highest type of life (abundant life in Christ). Also, there was something determined about his utterance. He wanted to urge upon others not only the fact of his experience, but its fulness and felicity as well.

What had transpired had placed him on a higher plain of thought and endeavor. The rocks would have cried out had he held his peace.

- He sensed the prevailing spiritual destitution.

- He saw the thwarted growth of believers.

- He noted the emptiness of testimony.

He had himself experienced the lack of victory. The only remedy he knew had just been discovered by him. He must inform others. To be crucified with Christ, that was all. But that was sufficient to produce the happiest and holiest state of being a heaven-bound pilgrim could ever conceive, much less experience.

“I am crucified,” he contended, and it was in the sweetest and wisest advisement to others that his testimony was declared abroad; for, to be crucified with Christ, to forfeit the best this world can offer, is to live with Christ, and share, here and now, the richest that heaven can bestow upon one yet in the flesh.

The assurance of his experience is piercingly challenging.

The most admirable quality about Paul’s whole, incomparable ministry was his unwavering faith. The grace of God became personified in him, insomuch that kings trembled before the impact of his forcefulness, and believers triumphed through the uplift of his encouragement. The joyful announcement that he was crucified to live was made not merely because he was altruistic, but because he did not shun to declare the full counsel of God (Acts 20:27). It was a voluntary quit-claim to all that might contradict or counteract the will of God and this was the primary fact of his experience which he so greatly desired to impress upon the minds of others.

In his sacred curriculum, Paul made no provision for the eradication theory, but he did give prominence to the Spirit over the flesh, permeating the life with victory, joyful and incontestable.

This triumph gives the Christian a new sense of values, but the real secret of promoting this new sense of values and really profiting therefrom is to be crucified with Christ. This opens the way for spiritual discernment (1 Corinthians 2:10).

The Christian does not possess a sixth sense, but he does possess the Spirit who quickens, controls, and directs his natural senses. This permits him to appraise, to approve, to appropriate, and to appreciate the things of God which appear as foolish to the unenlightened (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is neither the desire nor the design of our heavenly Father that we should spiritualize or rationalize, but it is His will that we should realize, through His revelation, matters that are vital. The new sense of values then is the enlightening operation of the Holy Spirit opening our dim eyes to behold wondrous things from His Word.

Yes, Paul was crucified to live.

Few informed people are disposed to question his exceptional exemplary life-a life which made the world brighter and man’s hope surer, his faith firmer and heaven more real.

If such a sublime earthly existence is possible only through one losing one’s life to find another, richer, fuller and deeper; and, if the finding of this greater, more abundant life necessitates a crucifixion of the old nature with its impotence and incompetence, only to rise anew in the might of the glorified Christ, then this was Paul’s transcendent experience. This is what he found by losing

self; this is what he won by winning Christ.

Must I take the cross of Jesus

Leave the things I value so;

Turn from harmless, earthly pleasures,

In a narrow way to go.

Others tell of joy and blessing, Yet they take a course that's wide; But I know that life abundant Came when Paul was crucified.

Surely here we have the challenge

And it's in the cruel cross;

We must fix our eyes on Jesus, See not drabness, death and loss.

Glory looms with bright attraction, If we will in Him abide;

For the joys of life abundant Come when we are crucified.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

01.02 Paul's Vision Vitalized

CHAPTER TWO PAUL'S VISION VITALIZED

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith" (Acts 9:18)

Divine optometry is hardly a fitting term for the clearing of impaired spiritual vision, yet the Great Physician performed just such operations. Of the Emmaus sojourners, it was said, "Their eyes were opened and they knew Him." It is a glorious fact, prolifically substantiated by Scripture, that this is precisely what the Lord desires to do for each one, even in this our day. Patiently He waits for eager hearts to cry, "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law [word]."

In the experience of Paul, when the scales fell, there was new light for a new life. His vision was at once majestic and grand in its sweep. There was a broad horizon with new values and countless opportunities.

When the scales fell, three facts became distinctly obvious. There was a New Character, a New Course, and a New Concern. A NEW CHARACTER With relation to the Saviour, Paul was a "chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15).

In the divine economy, this new convert was called of God to bear the name of Christ "before the Gentiles, and kings and the children of Israel."

In each case, the assignment, humanly speaking, was most difficult of performance. The Gentiles, or the heathen (goyim), were looked upon with much disfavor by the Jews, and that natural aversion had to be overcome.

Jonah fled from such a task. Nineveh was a Gentile city, and it was, in all probability, for this very reason that Jonah proceeded in another direction. Paul was of the strictest sect, a Pharisee, one of that company of Hebrew religionists who thanked God publicly that they were not as other men.

They could not preserve their sacred standing and fraternize with Gentiles; and to make it doubly hard in the fulfillment of this new commission, he had been indoctrinated with a hatred for Christ and a bitterness toward His message. However, immediately upon coming to grips with the Saviour, he received his assignment. This was it-bearing before the Gentiles that Name which is above every name. How else were they to receive hope? Jesus was born to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Israel" (Luke 2:32).

Not only that, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

But what could a name mean to a people who were outside the sphere of covenant privilege? What could one name mean to such a countless number? What could a name mean to a people who had so long worshipped idols? Much every way, when it represented the Lord of Glory

through Whom cometh salvation. With all that it meant, with all that it promised, that Name had to be borne by human agency, and Paul was a transformed vessel called for this very purpose, even to minister its message and meaning to the Gentiles.

The coverage of his commission was extensive. It ranged from the most degraded to the most elevated. Kings as well as commoners are lost without Christ and there is no hope for anyone apart from the Name that came from heaven. True, not many noble are called (1 Corinthians 1:26). It is equally true that not many noble are evangelized. Few of God's servants have had the boldness, through the Spirit, to preach Christ to the nobility of the earth.

With all of Paul's culture and refinement, education and training, he never seemed to recognize nobility apart from the earthly dignity of the office which always elicited an appropriate salutation. The royal robes of regal elegance were as paupers' apparel compared with the robe of righteousness. He thought more of a man's destination than of his distinction. He was an ambassador of the King of Kings. Gaining an hearing was more difficult than giving the message, but an entre through legal proceedings, instituted by others, on more than one occasion brought him before governmental officials where he capitalized on the slightest opportunity to bear a witness for Jesus the Christ.

While Paul was especially the apostle to the Gentiles, the divine commission included a ministry among his own people according to the flesh; and, hardly had he received his sight, until "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

But the Jews of Paul's day were no more receptive to the message of God than were their forbears in the day of Ezekiel when they were said to be impudent, stiff-hearted and rebellious scorpions. The Apostle confessed, "but even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart" (2 Corinthians 3:15).

This faithful servant made an earnest, honest effort to break through their defenses, but to little avail. Cosmopolitan assemblies to hear the gospel were not unusual, "but when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, 'it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:45-46).

With respect to other saints, Paul was a new brother.

Paul reached Damascus, the point of his planned destination; but, instead of entering the city as the ringleader of a hostile band of special deputies, he came with all the docility of a little child, being led by the hand. It was a triumphal entry, nevertheless, as time was to prove so irrefutably.

There he remained three days in blindness and without nourishment, having found refuge in the home of a certain man by the name of Judas on Straight Street.

His new experience was so cataclysmic, so transforming, that even three days were hardly sufficient to properly appraise this sudden turn of events. There was a blackout of his ambition, a blasting of his hopes and a bewildering mental state as to the next step and the direction in which

it would lead him. What would the members of the Sanhedrin think after his public boast of a successful roundup of Christian men, women and children in Damascus?

Paul was just beginning to perceive that, in a changing world, man is the greatest migrant and that definite plans are smashed by hands we never see, bringing the most unusual changes upon us suddenly and when we least expect. Could he go back and rejoin his former colleagues? Never!

He was a new character. With whom would he now cast his lot? would the Christians welcome into their midst a person who had been so hostile? Even if they did, could one whose training had been so foreign to this new faith feel at ease in such a fellowship?

Such considerations may have filled his mind those days, and perhaps were occupying his thinking when two sturdy hands fell upon his shoulders. It is generally conceded that one who is abruptly cast into blindness is very sensitive to approaches. How dramatically true this must have been of Paul!

He was a definitely displaced and unestablished individual; and in this handicap of blindness, which group would be the first to take advantage of him? Humanly speaking, he had ample cause for fear. Now, he was in someone's grip. He was pathetically defenseless-an object of pity indeed-but not for long.

In the kindliest manner, surprising as it was sudden, he heard the salutation, "Brother Saul."

This was the first time in his career he had ever been so greeted. A brother! What manner of people were Christians who could so quickly forgive an erstwhile persecutor and accept him so affectionately? Any one may be a perpetrator of evil, but one must be born again to be a brother.

Ananias claimed him as a brother because God had called him to be a son, and, together, they were members of the family of the redeemed.

With regard to himself, Paul was a new creation.

One cannot refrain from wondering whether this student of Gamaliel had ever heard, up to this time, the story of Nicodemus, a former ruler of the Jews. Yet one may know about the power of the gospel without experiencing its force, and about transforming grace without being changed.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Paul had contacted a power and was transformed. Of this, he never, through all his subsequent years, had reason to doubt. Accounting himself the chief of sinners, he knew that if he could be saved, then salvation was possible for all. He knew it brought a newness of life. This conviction moved him to assert, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

"How silently, how silently God's wondrous gift is given,

So God imparts to human hearts The blessings of His heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, But in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive Him still, The dear Christ enters in." The conversion of Saul of Tarsus brought a complete reversal in his life. The things he once loved became detestable, and the things which once he lacked became predominant. He quickly became accustomed to Christian procedure, received his knowledge from the Lord and hastened to enlighten others.

Using the various means of grace, he grew strong in the Lord and encouraged others to develop "till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

The newness of his Christian experience stood in marked contrast to his past. His present joy in service was exceeded only by his contemplation of the future, when he would stand face to face with the One Who rescued him from so great a death, there to be like Him and with Him eternally. A NEW COURSE The new course led Paul to preach Christ explicitly.

It was the Lord who dispatched Ananias to Straight Street in Damascus where the new convert was staying. After finding the little man with the blinded eyes and saluting him as a brother, Ananias explained that the Lord, even Jesus, had sent him that his sight might be restored and that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Immediately,

- He received his sight, which suggests illumination;

- He arose, which symbolizes resurrection;

- He was baptized, which portrays identification;

- He took meat, which denotes sustentation;

- He was strengthened, which indicated edification;

- He preached Christ, which was proclamation.

These factors illustrate the successive steps in the divine economy for the development of believers. From the time his eyes were opened, he saw the closed eyes or the multitudes and he knew that the preaching of Christ, Who is the light of the world, could bring people out of sin's darkness.

It is interesting to follow his procedure from the practical point of view.

He did not build an edifice or rent a hall. He went straightway to the Jewish synagogues. Since he had so completely renounced Judaism, does it not seem strange that he would venture into Jewish places of worship? It was not that he had received any official invitation. That would have been utterly contrary to their rules and regulations. Insofar as Judaism was concerned, Saul of Tarsus had died. In reality, that is precisely what had happened.

A new man had come forth, but Judaism never accepted him. Yet he went boldly into their synagogues. He knew that people needed, more than anything else in the world, the experience which had so revolutionized his own life. It was worth the attempt. His Lord would be pleased. He might meet with some embarrassment, but, then, he was willing to become a fool for Jesus' sake, and into the synagogues he went.

The substance of his message was Christ. This was not a matter to be treated reverently there. Christ was from the little town of Nazareth and it was colloquially popular to say in that day, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Besides, the crucifixion was over and the whole matter of Christ and His teachings was thought of as a dead issue. The “perverter” of their nation had been dealt with, and that with their approval, for they had said, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.”

Could they tolerate a new intrusion? Could they believe any message from one who so lately had turned “from their faith?” The Holy Spirit did not see fit to give us all the details. We only know that Paul preached in the synagogues and that Christ was the substance of his preaching.

If it is amazing to us that a new convert, under such strange conditions, would go boldly into the midst of Jews with the Christian message, then it is a matter of further wonderment when we note the theme of this novice preacher’s first sermon. It was this, “Christ, the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).

If there is one statement relative to Christ that is most difficult for Jewish minds to grasp, it is the fact that He is the Son of God.

Was it that Paul believed in doing things the hard way? Was it because he desired to convince them on this difficult matter? Or, was it because this glorious truth had so filled his own soul with joy that he felt constrained to labour this particular point before them? Of course, we do not know of a certainty apart from our belief that he was Spirit-led. This was his theme, and a great theme it was.

We can well imagine him citing John 3:16 and explaining how and why God gave His Son to become our Passover and our Mercy Seat, how the Son was the Meat-offering and how Calvary was the place of the Sin-offering. How stinging the indictment must have been when this fearless preacher concluded, “Had the princes of this world known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.”

The new course taught Paul to prove Christ implicitly.

“But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:22).

Paul may not have excelled in the general field of polemics; he may not have at all enjoyed argumentation; but if any one raised a question against his Lord, he was the apologist of the hour. The Jews at Damascus were no match for him. Their arguments were quickly refuted. In fact, according to the original, they were thrown into utter confusion. Their defensive structures collapsed utterly under the barrage of convincing truth from a man who spoke not by theory but from experience. He proved Christ.

If He were not the very Christ, then who intercepted that irate, determined, blood-thirsty creature that was forging his way toward innocent and unsuspecting worshippers? Who else could have wrought so mightily in a man’s life as to send him through a spiritual metamorphosis? Who else could catch him away to the third heaven to receive a glimpse of glory? In fact, who else could so completely satisfy every longing of his life, giving him “a hope that maketh not ashamed?”

It was because Paul had proved Him that he could say “Christ is all.”

In the Old Testament,

- He was the hope of the patriarch's longing,

- He was the blessing of the priest's serving,

- He was the message of the prophet's dreaming,

- He was the theme of the Psalmist's singing,

- He was the subject of the poet's writing.

In the whole fiber and framework of prophecy, He was then as He is now: "Christ is all" (Colossians 3:11).

It was in a dark hour of apostasy, with a nation sadly disintegrating, its moral standards deteriorating, and spiritual precepts practically discarded, that God appealed to the people, saying "Prove Me now" (Malachi 3:10).

Conditions cannot affect His power if His people will only prove Him. He will not forsake however dark the hour and we should not forget Him however bright may seem the day.

He proves the constancy of His care; we are to prove the sincerity of our love.

Paul called upon the Christians at Rome to "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Addressing the Corinthians, he exhorted them, saying, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

In a summation of the matter, from a practical point of view, he said "Prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

However, no one can appraise values properly who has not first proved Christ. He is the true standard of measurement, for with Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Christ cannot approve in the twentieth century what he disapproved in the first. He cannot countenance in one age what He had discountenanced in another.

If a different moral gauge is applied today, and it would seem that such is the case, then Satan has deceptively struck a telling blow. If the norm of Christian conduct is below the demand of the thrice-holy God, then is the life, with all its good intentions, most displeasing to the Lord. Never was there a time when it was more imperative for God's people to prove Christ, to learn His will, to know His way, to do His work.

The new course prompted Paul to praise Christ with simplicity.

It is just as natural for a Christian to learn that praise is comely as it is for a babe to recognize its parents. Praise is the expulsiveness of gratitude, the fragrance of appreciation.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

This is a typical expression of praise. It was not a wild demonstrative outburst, but a heart-prompted transmission of gratefulness, carefully assayed and most appropriate. Praise is a coronary concert beamed heavenward-“making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

- Praise is to be perennial, “giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).

- Praise is a divinely devised means and a Spirit approved way of saying “thanks” to the Lord for all His benefits so profusely bestowed.

It has a soul-enriching effect and a contagious result.

A praising soul solicits company, making a symphonized presentation of heart rejoicing to Him Who is worthy.

“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together” (Psalms 34:3).

Paul was ever grateful to God for His bountiful goodness and his expressions of appreciation were simple and sincere. A NEW CONCERN The new concern gave Paul the proper perspective.

With his new birth, there naturally came a shift of emphasis in his life. He termed it a crucifixion of self and chose to forget the things that were behind. The old order had changed; yielding place to the new, and God had fulfilled Himself in many ways. Unlike Ephraim whom God called a “silly dove” (Hosea 7:11) because he was destitute of a sense of direction, Paul quickly perceived that in all things Christ should have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). This was primary.

This was vastly more important than soulwinning, as vital as that is. It was wider in meaning and significance; it was all-embracing. He belonged to Christ now and what he did no longer pertained to himself, only, but definitely affected the One Who loved Him and gave Himself for him. How well he recognized this fact is seen in his Roman epistle, for he taught that “whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8).

Christ was preeminent in Paul’s love.

His heart’s affection was bound about his Saviour and Lord with the threefold cord of devotion, desire and delight. Love is variously affected. It can be gained, lost, stimulated, suppressed, strengthened, weakened, deepened, deserted, but Paul’s love for Christ was both constant and consistent.

- The Father makes love reciprocal-“We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

- The Son makes love constraining-“The love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

- The Spirit makes love possessive - “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5).

- Christians make love assuring-“We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).

- Service makes love challenging-“Charity [Love] suffereth long and is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

- Prayer makes love tender-“Pray for them which despitefully use you” (Matthew 5:44).

- The Scriptures make love intelligent-“Herein is our love made perfect” (1 John 4:17).

- Praise makes love expressive-“I found Him Whom my soul loveth” (Song of Solomon 3:4).

It was Paul’s great love for Christ which sent him through unspeakable trials with never a complaint and no thought of the cost.

Christ was preeminent in Paul’s learning.

Inconsistencies in the lives of believers brought from him the statement, “Ye have not so learned Christ” (Ephesians 4:20). On the contrary, learning Christ is to acquaint oneself with the highest principles of proper behavior. Learning Christ is to become familiar with His attributes. “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). His yoke is easy but not elastic. To learn Christ is to become cognizant of His desires which serve as a practical guide for those who would walk in all things well pleasing before the Lord. This was the consuming passion in Paul’s life; for, with deep heart emotion, he cried, “That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Php 3:10).

Christ was preeminent in Paul’s life.

If any one utterance that came from the lips of the Apostle could be construed as a motto, surely it would be, “For to me to live is Christ; to die is gain” (Php 1:21).

When one can veraciously make a statement such as this, he has, in truth, died unto self, and the life of another becomes apparent. It was not an imitation of Christ in this instance, but an expression of Christ through a thorough personal dedication. It was not of the servant’s doing but of the Lord’s design. He will reflect His own life of purity through any one who will meet the conditions. Then others see Him and are attracted to Him, and such an one is a channel of untold blessing to an unrevealed number. A most profitable kind of self-examination may be imposed, when one sincerely wants God to have His wonderful way. by asking, “Can others see Jesus in me? Do others take knowledge that I have been with Him?” Paul lived Christ and Christ graciously lived through him. This is a challenge to all who claim to be partakers of the divine nature. The new concern filled Paul with an urge to evangelize.

It has been said that we only need to be concerned about three men as we journey through life-the Man at God’s right hand, the man within and the man out yonder. When the man within comes to grips, as did Saul of Tarsus, with the glorified Man at God’s right hand, then the man out in sin’s enthralling darkness pulls heavily upon his heartstrings of compassion.

Consider something of Paul’s varied experiences and his emotional reactions. He was “in labors abundantly, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often and in diversified perils, in weariness and painfulness, in hunger, and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

In all of these trying ordeals, there was no complaint and no tears. Yet when he introduced the subject of men dying without Christ, he was greatly moved: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction” (Php 3:17-18).

No tears in trial, but grave concern for the lost made Paul the Jeremiah of New Testament fame.

Sadly enough, there has come a reversal among Christians, they shed tears in trial but are largely unperturbed by the sorrowful end awaiting those who know not God.

Paul’s prayer for Israel was coupled with desire (Romans 10:1).

The desire was their soul’s salvation. His prayer was fervent and his desire strong; hence, he had the joy of winning many to Christ. He called them his “crown of rejoicing” (1 Thessalonians 2:19). It was always a pressing concern. He felt himself a debtor to the whole world. It was a restlessness from which he never sought surcease.

As long as there were men to be won, and as long as he was in his earthly tabernacle, he pressed on and on, day by day, in quest of souls for the Saviour, so tireless and true was he in his high calling. He did not punch a clock each morning, but he knew that one day he would stand at the judgment seat of Christ to give account of his deeds done in the flesh, his use of opportunities and his discharge of duty.

Yes, the scales fell. He saw clearly the course for his life, and the new concern so completely obliterated every other ambition and aspiration that he ran well the race that was set before him. Of the number of God’s servants, there have been many; but of the kind that never vacillates, deviates or fluctuates in a whole course, but majors in self-effacement and divine magnification unceasingly, there was but one.

From the moment his eyes were opened to behold a new life and a heavenly home, to know the constraining love of Christ and the crying need of men, that tireless servant of God’s choosing became a champion of truth without equal, an imitator of Christ without rival, and a challenge to our faith without comparison.

Surely, if earnest, longing Christians were to pray with soul sincerity, “Open thou my eyes that I might see,” the scales would fall. The vision resultant would be both majestic and grand, giving proper proportion and accurate perspective concerning spiritual values. Toward such, the Lord would not be compelled to direct the indictment, “Eyes have they, but they see not.”

~ end of chapter 2 ~

01.03 Paul Was A Christian

CHAPTER THREE PAUL WAS A CHRISTIAN

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26) The intensified persecution subsequent to Stephen’s martyrdom forced the disciples to move out in various directions, witnessing to the Truth of God as they journeyed, and tabulating amazing results. Perhaps the greatest number of converts recorded in any one place following the Pentecostal ingathering was at Antioch in Syria, a city on the banks of the Orontes, three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. There, “a great number believed and turned unto the Lord, and the hand of the Lord was with them.” It was most evident that the gospel was beginning to send forth its rays of hope in an ever-broadening radius, ultimately to encircle the globe. The Church of Christ was growing.

Growth is an incomparable and unrivalled phenomenon. There is a certain grandeur about it, whether it be of organism or of organization. The opening of a petal, the formation of a cell, the increase of size, the evidence of maturity, the development of power, the extension of influence-all elicit deep wonderment. Yet, nowhere is growth so surrounded by mystery as in the spiritual realm.

There is a building which, “fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.” It was designed in the blueprints of Omniscience before the world began, was destined to be the habitation of God through the Spirit. It is composed of living stones. Christ in His efficacious and sufficient accomplishment at Calvary became the only and everlasting foundation. Then, the Holy Spirit, in His divine function, began to quicken believing hearts and to integrate these living stones into the “holy temple” of which Paul spoke. Willing workers dedicated themselves to the proposition of holding forth the Word of Life, and this they did with commendable steadfastness, counting not their lives dear unto themselves.

Barnabas was sent to Antioch.

The gladdening news of the Spirit’s operations began to flash through the darkness of a decadent Judaism, and the corona of the aurora borealis centered in Antioch in the province of Seleucia. There the Word found a ready reception and the city was set aglow with a pervasive joy hitherto unknown.

When these illuminating facts began filtering into Jerusalem, the disciples concluded it wise to dispatch a special envoy to consolidate these phenomenal gains. How very reasonable that they should appoint Barnabas, the son of consolation.

Surely, we, too, would have unhesitatingly cast our vote for him. He was eminently qualified to be a spiritual nurse for the newborn babes in Christ reported there; and, as later developments were irrefutably to prove, this was but one important link in the chain of events ordered by the Spirit for this fine man of God whose scriptural characterization is so strikingly significant. It tells us that “he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.”

The word “goodness” speaks of moral excellence and is never used unadvisedly in the Bible. Many times human judgment pronounces a man good when the true standard has never been attained, but not so with this listing. The secret of his noble life inheres in the revelation, “full of the Holy Ghost.” This was not qualification. It was occupation. The Lord of the Harvest was enthroned in his life, making his disposition sweet and wholesome and his endeavors proper and productive.

Barnabas was one who reposed implicit confidence in the virility of the Truth and in the integrity of God. He was sustained by an undergirding assurance in the great possibilities of the gospel and was animated by the inexorableness of the Divine will. He had a deep conviction for the things of promise which, as yet, he could not see. By such faith, the saints of old won God’s approval. Faith so bolstered his mind and heart that there was an appreciable stability to him which made for an ideal personality to encourage a group of novices in the faith.

Barnabas sought for Paul.

How overwhelming the developments must have been at Antioch during those glorious days! It was a sweeping victory for the cause of Christ, for “much people was added unto the Lord.” In the midst of all this holy, happy experience, Barnabas acquired a desire to have Paul with him, not so much for fellowship as for assistance in dealing with the many converts whose establishment in the faith was eminently essential lest Satan should take advantage of their immaturity.

Paul’s spiritual discernment, his abounding zeal, his steadfastness, to say nothing of his pedagogical aptitude, would prove invaluable at this particular time. The Antiochan believers required such leadership, and who else among the saints of God would more thoroughly enjoy, with exuberant satisfaction, this wonderful time of refreshing from out of the presence of the Lord?

The combined urge was too self-asserting for Barnabas to suppress. Paul must be brought; and to make certain of his whereabouts and to assure his delivery, Barnabas set out personally to seek him.

Paul was at Tarsus, but what led Barnabas to believe that he might locate him there is not explained. It must be remembered that Barnabas was a man highly favoured of the Holy Spirit Who administers the things of God in every part of the Church age, and guides those who yield to His patient care.

In due course, Barnabas reached Tarsus, a city which Paul later declared to be of no mean rating. It was a flourishing city of some considerable consequence. It was renowned as a place of education, and some historians compare it favorably in this respect with Athens. Barnabas, though less intensive and less demonstrative than either Peter or Paul, was, nevertheless, successful in his various pursuits and finally located him whom he sought. Without excessive persuasion, Paul quickly gave his assent; and, perceiving it to be of the Lord’s direction, accompanied his earnest solicitor. Together, they journeyed toward Antioch, discussing en route the many pleasing details of the mighty movements of the Spirit in progress there.

Antioch was a place of applied Christianity.

An interesting commentary is recorded relative to the first arrival of Barnabas at Antioch, “who, when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

What a wonderful report! Here is the practical side of the gospel; here is faith in operation: here is Christianity applied. A more striking illustration of evidential salvation is nowhere to be found.

Applied Christianity makes the work of the Spirit apparent.

Barnabas saw the grace of God. That is, he witnessed the unmistakable results of an inwrought salvation. The good seed of the gospel had not only germinated and sprung up into attractive foliage but had already blossomed into fruitage. The converts conducted themselves as though something had transpired, as, indeed, something really had. Their attitudes and actions were commending the gospel to their fellowmen and their conviviality permeated the atmosphere with an exhilarating encouragement for others to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Parched as we are in a desert of spiritual drought, we cannot but thirst for such refreshment, all of which, and more, is just as possible today if the productive principles of Christianity were accorded a faithful application.

Applied Christianity makes the joy of the servant evident.

Barnabas was glad. He who arrived full of the Holy Ghost is now filled with joy. He had never witnessed anything quite like this before, and he entered into the enjoyment to the fullest extent of his capacity. Salvation inoculates the believer with a pleasure in his soul that cannot be duplicated, imitated, or approximated by anything in the bill-of-fare of the world system. Joy is the desire of the Saviour.

“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). Joy is the design of the Spirit.

“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

Joy is the delight of the saint.

“Whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

Applied Christianity makes the purpose of the saint definite.

They had a fixed resolve to remain faithful to the Lord, for purpose is primary in matters of spiritual profession. Such purpose, to prove profitable, must be of the heart. Barnabas “exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord.”

It is the heart and not the head which governs devotion to the Lord. We believe with the heart. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

We give from the heart. “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

We react with the heart. “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek” (Psalms 27:8).

Ordinarily, we think of the heart as palpitating, not articulating, as pulsating and not enunciating, but this is the method of the Spirit to impress upon us the fact that dealing with the Lord is an heart matter. The love which registers with Him, Who is love, is that which comes from a pure heart (1 Timothy 1:5). The way to reverence God is in singleness of heart (Colossians 3:22). It is pointed out that errors which so sadly affect one's spiritual status originate in the heart (Hebrews 3:10). And, further, the only way to assure Divine response to an appeal is to cry with the heart (Hosea 7:14).

These new believers at Antioch were dead in earnest. Their heart was behind this new life into which they had so recently entered. Acts 11:23 could be covered by three words: namely, exhibition, exultation and exhortation.

The college of truth at Antioch.

It is indeed likely that Paul's introduction to this joyful situation, produced by the transforming message of grace, caused him to exclaim in the words of the Queen of Sheba: "Howbeit, I believed not (fully) the report until I came and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me."

This was much to the liking of this new champion of the faith and he was ready to lend any assistance possible. It was very evident that a revelation of the Scriptures was the next important requirement if these babes in Christ were to grow in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord.

Thus, Paul joined Barnabas in a teaching ministry which extended over a period of one year. This was actually the beginning of Paul's great ministry which, literally, has never ended.

The training at Antioch was orthodox.

An institution is, in reality, just what its leaders are, so far as character is concerned. If the instructors are sound, then the teaching will be sound. Paul's orthodoxy was never questioned. He was superbly a "straight thinker," teaching the Divine authorship of the Scriptures and their authority and utility in fully furnishing the Christian in every good work. Through the protracted presence of Paul and his faithful instruction, the Antioch Church apparently exceeded the Jerusalem assembly in importance. Its impact upon sacred history far excelled all other early churches.

The training at Antioch was thorough.

The curriculum may be suggested by a verse which Paul later wrote for the edification of believers: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

Before entering the deeper truths, they had to become established in the fact of their new position. Now, by faith, they were "in Christ." This was the groundwork of Paul's teaching.

What it means to be in Christ both positionally and practically is the starting point: then comes the wisdom of the Word, a revelation of God's will and way. This is followed by the doctrine of imputation, or how we become righteous. "He Who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

No one could teach about sanctification like Paul. He did not confuse terms or garble facts. Clearly he showed how a yielding, submissive believer is progressively set apart for the Lord, being filled with the Spirit and used proportionately. Then, the redemption, which was Paul's senior subject, carried the student, in thought, to the day when the "reserved inheritance" would be realized and the fulness of Calvary's purchase would enable all believers to stand in the likeness of the Lord.

The teaching was decidedly doctrinal. To Timothy, Paul once wrote, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine."

The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

True conversion and proper training always result in Christlikeness. This is the desire of the Lord, the aim of Scripture and the need of the church. The students at Antioch soon became living epistles which were readily read and known of all men. Their speech was seasoned with grace, their conduct was exemplary and their joy in the Lord was abounding.

While it may not have been intended as a compliment, these followers of Christ were dubbed "Christian," a name which has attached itself to believers to this very day.

How appropriate that Paul should have been among those who first were honoured with this expressive appellative.

Our vocabulary would be impoverished indeed without the word "Christian."

While its usage has suffered from altogether too wide an application, it nevertheless retains the basic thought of an imitator of Christ. As a noun, it speaks of confession; as an adjective, it suggests conduct.

In any event, it identifies one with the Saviour.

Paul could not have sought a greater honour. He wore the name well and ever strove to give it the dignity it deserved and to guard against any reproach that might tarnish its luster. It was his badge of identification as he trekked the land in preaching tours and travelled the seas on mission voyages.

Though given by men, it has been approved of God as is indicated by its two subsequent usages in the sacred page; and we, today, accept it as indicative of our relation to Him Whom we follow in lowly paths of service. But its truest bearer, its worthiest beneficiary, and its most noteworthy exemplar was the one who taught the Antiochans the lessons which brightened the town with a reflection of Christ. Paul was a Christian!

~ end of chapter 3 ~

01.04 Paul Salutes A New Captain

CHAPTER FOUR PAUL SALUTES A NEW CAPTAIN

“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)

Paul, immediately before his conversion, had reached the pinnacle of sheer fanaticism in his expressed animosity toward Christ. Never had a Philistine so plagued the people of God. Though small of stature, he was a Goliath of opposition. However, one pebble from the greater David felled him. It was not a stone in the cup of a sling which wrought his undoing; it was the force in the crook of a question:-“Why persecutest thou me?”

He quickly capitulated. He had been treacherous in his aversion to Christ and His disciples, but the question terminated his antipathy. The inquiry made him an inquirer and prompted his momentous plea-“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

At the time of this query, there was a pronounced inward reaction, more spiritual than psychological. His whole emotional life was thrown into a state of quickened action. He was trembling as he spoke. Those who knew him before and after observed him as one who was not easily frightened. On the contrary, he was recognized as an unusually fearless type of individual, and perhaps for this reason mainly was assigned to the task of carrying out the proposed Damascus persecution. Now, he trembled as he sought different marching orders from a new authority.

The account reveals that he not only trembled but was profoundly astonished. It was not an ordinary bewilderment, but an enlightening disillusionment.

- He was amazed that anything, or any one, could thwart the fulfillment of his determined effort.

- He was stunned by a challenge so convincing in its presentation.

- He was surprised at the spectacular suddenness of this transforming experience.

- He was overwhelmed above all that Christianity, so utterly despised by him and his erstwhile colleagues, should so completely arrest his inquiring attention.

It should be kept in mind that Saul of Tarsus was not an illiterate man and by no means an obscure personality. He was not a psycho-neurotic or a vacillating weakling. He was not one to be easily daunted or deterred.

There is sufficient proof that he was well educated for his day, that he was a public figure, a man of prestige, of determined character and of marked valour. His meeting with the Christ of God wrought miraculous changes. His planned undertaking was permanently disrupted. It was, in all probability, the only unfinished assignment of his life. The natural emphasis of his philosophy was to see a job to its completion.

He bade farewell to his present endeavors and humbled himself at the feet of a new Master. Even as Peter, James and John left their nets, and Matthew the receipt of custom, so Saul resigned his post at once. The search warrant in his pocket became utterly useless. There is no record of its actual disposition, but we know the legal document of condemnation was exchanged for the message of divine salvation. His threats of slaughter vanished forever.

Soon he became filled with the Spirit, changing from a maddened state of bloodthirstiness to the making of melody in his heart unto the Lord. What a miracle of grace! Furthermore, he completely lost sight of his unholy aim. It disappeared as a bubble bursting in the air.

“Now his thoughts were for the souls of men;

He had lost his life to find it again.” The question was primary in importance.

This query, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” was directed to the Supreme Issuer of commands. In a sense, it was the surrender signal of a treacherous enemy who thereby conceded defeat. It was prophetic of the day when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Php 2:11). All the blaspheming antichristian characters who ever lived will bend the knee and make the confession in that hour of sad disillusionment.

The salutation “Lord” was indicative of putting the Saviour first, of giving Him His rightful place, of owning Him as the proper one to exercise lordship. It was a salutation that never lost its appeal for Paul. He employed it with frequency in prayer, in praise, and in preaching. His soul was subdued by all it meant to a helpless, earthly pilgrim and by all it promised to a raptured or resurrected saint. Even the privilege of inquiring of Him for an explanation of His will was a distinct honour, and to be His very own was unspeakably glorious.

This was the surrender of triumph, the victory of meeting the One Who alone can take a poor lost sinner, save him from his sins and set him free.

There seemed to be no hesitance whatsoever in his acceptance when once the identity was made clear. His eyes were closed in blindness but his ears were open in willingness. He had heard a voice saying, “I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest.” There was no argument, no self-justification, no procrastination. There was a deep repentance which at once softened a hardened heart and sweetened a bitter soul, so that he could, with tender reverence, acclaim Jesus as Lord.

This was the first reverential articulation ever elicited from his lips for Jesus, Who, from henceforth and forever, would be everything to him.

The question was particular in specification.

So complete was the transformation in Paul’s life that he was immediately disposed to direct all his energies into the service of his newfound Lord. “WHAT wilt Thou have me to do?”

If there was to be a change, and that was now assured, then he must get started on the right foot. This whole thing was new to him. He was honest in his previous conclusions that there was nothing worthwhile about Christianity. He considered it a favour for God and man to silence those who were spending their time in its propagation.

In this moment of a definitely changed attitude, he must inquire for some specific directions.

It meant that he was confessing that his whole religious life had been a mistake; but when the glory of Christ so floods the soul of a man, no confession, however humbling, is too difficult. What Paul was there requesting was the promise of some occupation to fill the dismal void which was occasioned by the abrupt eviction of all the old things from his life.

So active a person as he must have something to do. Little did he know that the answer to that pointed question would lead him through such great perils as were before him. It would not have mattered, no, not an iota. He now belonged to Christ whose grace would be amply sufficient for any eventuality, and no hardship could be too great. In putting the question, there was displayed confidence that this new voice of authority could give him the proper directions which he so specifically sought. That confidence was never violated. That which Paul gave to others was always derived from the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23). Step by step, the Lord's directions were received until he finished the course. That he was obedient to those directions is indicated by one of his last earthly utterances, "I have kept the faith."

The question was personal in application. "What wilt Thou have ME to do?"

The one applying for instructions certainly had a disqualifying record. True, he had suddenly undergone a change. He was a different man entirely, but had he proved it? No, he had not as yet the opportunity of doing so. This question was propounded right on the scene where the new birth transpired.

Somehow, Paul must have understood that this One, to whom he was applying, knew all things and could penetrate into the secret chambers of a man's soul. Peter, one morning about a frugal meal with his Lord, commented, '"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest I love thee" (John 21:17). Paul did not use the same words, but they are inferred. If he received an assignment, then he could, through faithfulness, prove to others that he had met the Lord. He wanted to get established. He meant to be useful. He was ready to sign on the dotted line, willing to suffer reproach, if need be, as a true and faithful follower of the Lord of glory.

The question was pressing in challenge. "What wilt Thou have me TO DO?"

It was a challenge first of all to his own soul. Whatever the Lord might answer would command and receive his best.

- He would so run as to win; so press as to gain the prize of his high calling;

- He would so live as to provoke the Jews to jealousy;

- He would so walk as to guard against being a castaway (disapproved); and, by supporting grace, never become weary in well-doing.

Those colleagues who journeyed with him toward Damascus "stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man" (Acts 9:7). If they heard the Lord's voice, they must have heard Paul's. They were not offended because he had pledged allegiance to another for "they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus." It would not be difficult to believe they received his first sermon. It would be most interesting, indeed, to know about the details of their conversation during the remainder of the journey, to learn just what were their several reactions and to determine whether or not any of them accepted Christ as their personal Saviour.

That they were noticeably affected is stated; but to what extent Paul was able to capitalize on such an advantage, remains for us to discover when we meet in glorified array to know all things as we are now known. They could not have escaped the challenge of Paul's surrender to Christ, nor can we escape.

While we read his life and rejoice in his triumphs, let us remember they were the outcome of wholehearted yieldedness to the Lord. He was no more promising as an evangel of the gospel than the average individual today. In fact, he was neither impressive in appearance nor pleasing in speech (2 Corinthians 10:10), but a yielded person in the hands of the Holy Spirit always becomes a potent instrument for the cause of Christ.

The question was proof of his readiness to enter the new life.

Meeting Christ always produces dissatisfaction with the old life, for "the things of earth grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace."

He had been satisfied up to this point. In simple but expressive language, he did not know what he had been missing.

- Those born blind cannot appreciate the sunset, for they have never seen it.

- Those born deaf cannot appreciate the harmony of music, for they have never heard it.

- Those born in the heart of the jungles cannot appreciate the comforts of civilization, for they have never had them.

The people born in a state of depravity, and remaining there, cannot appreciate Him Who is the Lord of glory, for they have never known Him. Paul had met Him and heard His voice. That made every difference. He fell in love with the Lover of his soul.

"When you know Him, when you know Him You'll love Him just as others do;

A glorious morn will dawn for you, When you know our Saviour, too."

Paul did not get ready to enter this new life; he was made ready by the impact of Christ's power upon his soul. He was born again, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, accepted in the Beloved and received into the family of God. Night had departed and the morn had dawned. It was as wonderful as it was sudden. He died but began living at once. In the twinkling of an eye all opposition ceased in his soul and all bitterness disappeared. All he needed was this revelation of the Lord and he was ready to enter by the Door into the sheepfold.

There was something very definite about his question, something so meaningful. It showed the earnestness of his soul. If his voice could be heard, he perhaps would sum it up in these words;

"I have seen the vision, And for self I cannot live;

Life is less than worthless 'Till my all I give." The question was prompted by his willingness to begin properly.

Poor beginnings are seldom promising of success. Experience has taught us that wrong starts not only thwart growth but are difficult of correction. Jeremiah contended that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

Paul could have reasoned, as so many do, that time was required for a better understanding of the situation before any commitment could be made, something of a breathing spell to get his feet on the ground. Any move just then could have been construed as an emotional reaction. Nothing of this nature was entertained. Paul had met the Saviour and had definitely believed on Him. It was to be an eternal relationship and he could not begin too soon to acquaint himself with the means whereby he might walk in close fellowship with his blessed Lord. He wanted to begin properly. The course he followed is an apt example of accurate procedure. James taught it in the following words, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given unto him” (James 1:5).

There was, of course, not only willingness to know but willingness to do. No one can begin to live properly for Christ until obedience is learned, and obedience is not learned until Christ is owned as “Lord.” That salutation prefacing Paul’s question embraced all the basic essentials of a good beginning. It was a quit-claim to all his earthly aspirations and a disowning of all personal rights. It was a forsaking of all attachments and a turning from all past designs. It was the implicit reposing of himself upon the recognized authority of another without mental reservation or qualification. It meant that what his Lord said was indisputably right. From this attitude he never deviated but rather grew stronger in the conviction as the years passed by. No one can fail who trusts Christ absolutely nor can one go astray who follows His counsel. A Christian is one who trusted Christ and keeps on trusting.

The question was proffered in eagerness to please Him Who had called.

Some simply take for granted that their lives are pleasing to the Lord; others are definitely unconcerned; while countless numbers make not the slightest pretence.

This was not satisfactory to this new convert. He must know for certain and the information must come directly from the Lord. Jehovah had explained to Israel, through Moses, what was acceptable to Him and what was decidedly unacceptable. These forbears of Paul’s became increasingly indifferent to the wishes of the Lord and brought offerings that were lame and blind and torn. With grief, Jehovah said to them “Offer it now unto thy governor, will he be pleased with thee?” (Malachi 1:8).

Such an attitude by the people shows a pathetic lack of love. Paul’s whole Christian life stands in marked contrast. He displayed intense eagerness to live in all well-pleasing before the gaze of heaven.

He attempted to please the Lord in purpose, for his purpose was positive. “Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). Some commentators explain that the word “labour” means “ambitious.” The same word employed elsewhere by Paul has been translated “study” and “strive.” By putting all three words together, we might sense something of his bent toward a heaven-approved behavior. His purpose was not only positive but manifestly pressing. He tried to redeem the time, pushing ever onward, praying and planning, travelling and teaching, witnessing and working, in order to account for as many

converts as possible in the brief and uncertain period of time which he had, and to propagate the gospel as widely as privilege would permit.

He also sought to please the Lord in purity. Calling upon his fellow-believers in Corinth, he appealed, “Dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Surely Gamaliel had taught Paul about the manner of the priests in the old order, since the books of Moses gave prominence to such matters. It is written, “And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him, that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office” (Exodus 40:13).

As a believer-priest, how could a New Testament servant pay less attention to cleansing since God is the same yesterday, today and forever?

The question was put to procure knowledge.

It was knowledge he was requesting that he might intelligently do God’s will. Jesus attested the fact that “if any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17). The willingness of Paul qualified him thus to be informed. His first lessons were difficult.

The Lord hinted to Ananias of what they would consist, “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).

Thus, his initial teaching concerned hardship rather than happiness, heaviness instead of heaven, trial instead of triumph, “but Saul increased the more in strength . . . proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:22). Then came the deeper things, revelations which had been withheld from all others such as the mystery of the Ephesian letter.

Paul unqualifiedly believed in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, for he later said, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

In the sacred presentations, then, were authority and utility and sufficient enlightenment to fully furnish every true servant of the living God. His knowledge of the divine economy was exceedingly extensive. He was the most eminent teacher of doctrine-at home in any branch of the subject.

Some of his greatest treatises consisted of:

- The matter of justification in Romans four and five,

- His thesis on the security of the saints in Romans eight,

- His description of the Lord’s table in First Corinthians eleven,

- His dissertation on love in First Corinthians thirteen,

- His classic on the resurrection in First Corinthians fifteen,

- His delineation of new things in Christ in Second Corinthians five,

- His plea for separation in Second Corinthians six,

- His distinction between law and grace in Galatians,

- His revelation of “the mystery” in Ephesians,

- His belief in the blessed hope in First Thessalonians,

- His unmasking of end-time entities in Second Timothy.

The question was productive of opportunity and privilege.

Even in the secular realm, willingness and initiative are precursors of promotion. It must have been most gratifying to the Lord to hear this chosen vessel, standing in his blindness along the Damascus road, asking if there was something he could do.

Paul lost no time in offering himself for service and he was sincerity personified. Right then and there, he was ready to become a bondslave of Christ. There are countless opportunities for men of that stripe who have been so few in number down through the years. The Lord can trust them with extra privileges; for in them all, such godly men would give Him the glory.

God permitted Paul to reveal truth heretofore hidden from others; to become the first real missionary of the church; to preach to kings and to visit heaven, where he experienced, for a moment, such blissful enjoyment that no earthly law of understanding could permit a revelation of his experience. No other man was allowed to hear the words he heard in paradise. How singular are the privileges of a man in any age who will, like Paul, place himself entirely at the disposal of the Lord!

Space precludes the possibility of delineating in much detail the almost endless array of opportunities which were granted this true and worthy soldier of the cross. His life was crowded with activity, but his opportunities were no greater or more numerous than ours. He better knew how to see them and how to capitalize on them.

An opportunity only becomes a privilege in this way.

Being cast into prison was not a catastrophe, but a chance to evangelize. God allowed his servant to be bound so He could blast open the gates. Then the power would be known as of Him and not of man; and those who required a sign would believe.

A hair-raising voyage through an unprecedented storm was not such a sad experience when he could win more than two hundred to Christ, thereby causing rejoicing in heaven. He had learned in whatsoever state he was, therein to be content, and to find grace under all circumstances to rejoice; but in alert watchfulness, he welcomed every opportunity to snatch men as brands from the burning.

It all began when he asked the Master for his first assignment and never ended until he closed his eyes in a martyr’s death.

The question was the precursor of responsibility.

Upon entering the service of the King of Kings, he would become either a stepping stone or a stumbling block. His life would not be his own. He would be standing in Christ’s stead, reconciling men to God, standing between the living and the dead, a place that even an archangel in glory

could not assume. The responsibility therefore, was most pronounced, and no one has ever recognized that fact more than Paul; but, even in this respect, there is no evidence of fear or strain.

He knew that the Holy Spirit would lead him daily in acquitting himself acceptably, so he majored in perfecting a yieldedness of spirit, soul and body to this ever faithful Guide.

His responsibility was not only pronounced, but it was also extensive. Because he so thoroughly dedicated himself to Christian service, he was granted a wide field of privilege. Every privilege was a responsibility. He was an evangelist, a teacher and a missionary. His much travelling gave him contact with a great host of people who needed special assistance. Since he was a called apostle, the various local churches looked to him for a solution of internal difficulties. The number of calls upon his time must have been exceedingly great, but he firmly leaned upon the unfailing promise, “As thy days so shall thy strength be.”

His responsibility was accountable. He taught much about the time when the Righteous Judge would assay the value of believers’ works according to His unerring standard of justice. This indicated that the matter was prominent in his own mind, but all believers are equally concerned (2 Corinthians 5:10). Our works will be judged, tried as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:13). How definitely, like the beloved Apostle, should we earnestly contend for the faith.

The Lord has entrusted to us the “talents and the pounds” and He expects some return, something to show for our faithfulness. We will be held accountable.

If any stand in shame before the Lord and suffer loss, it will not be because that blessed servant of the early church did not discharge his responsibility in waving us on to an abundant entrance.

Down through the ages, piercing the din of man’s turmoil and Satan’s disruptions, comes the voice of that venerable Apostle to spur us on, shouting, “Quit you like men, be strong!”

A prayerful look upon his record of triumphs should elicit a personalized use of his question, “Lord, what wilt Thou have ME to do?”

~ end of chapter 4 ~

01.05 Paul's Keynote At Corinth

CHAPTER FIVE

PAUL'S KEYNOTE AT CORINTH

"Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not"

(2 Corinthians 4:1)

Pleasing platform performance was undoubtedly not among Paul's acquirements. The Corinthian people spoke disparagingly both of his bodily appearance and of his oratorical ability, but acknowledged a gravity in his message. His style was clear, concise and convincing. He possessed the coveted faculty of being able to express multum in farvo-much in few words.

As a teacher of doctrine, he has never been excelled. Heaven's richest wisdom flowed freely from him in a pointed, practical manner without ambiguity or verbosity. His certainty of expression, undergirded by unquestioned sincerity, gave him prestige with thinking people. The psychology of his approach, the logic of his development and the pungency of his challenge brought him the great success which crowned his dedicated efforts.

The keynote of his message to the Corinthian believers reminds of a great general who says to his soldiers, "The assignment before us is most important. We know our cause is just. Let US go forward." After his premise was soundly established, this fearless preacher came to the point, "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not."

This is obviously a UNIQUE ministry.

(1) It outshines the law. "For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory" (2 Corinthians 3:9).

Paul stressed the fact that grace transcends the law, and he emphasized the better things under the new covenant. He pictured the law as a pedagogue, leading children up to Christ in Whom they could put away childish things and become men. He described the law as being weak through the flesh, and delighted in the fact that God sent His Son to condemn sin in the flesh. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness," he contended. He did not mean that Christ had merely punctuated the law, but that he had absorbed it, taking all the force of its killing letter, fulfilling all its rigorous requirements, then presenting a glorious righteousness without impossible exactions as a gift absolutely free.

(2) It outweighs the wisdom of men.

When Paul wrote, "The world by wisdom knew not God," he revealed that no ministry of human origin was capable of bringing men into vital relationship with God. Education is indispensable, but it cannot bring men to God. Reformation is valuable, but it cannot justify a sinner. Worldly wisdom may raise the living standard, but it cannot lift a soul to heaven.

(3) It outlines the deliverance of God.

It is a ministry with a throb of love:

- Which reaches to the utmost depth in pity,

- Which goes to the greatest length in mercy,

- Which lifts to the loftiest height in power,

- Which keeps through the endless ages in faithfulness and

- Which gives the richest, most boundless gifts in grace.

It calls when men are careless, invites when they are indifferent and helps when all are helpless. Step by step it leads from sin and despair through the avenue of faith into the fulness of Christ.

To show that the Christian ministry offered a living message to a dying world, the Apostle emphasized its universality by stressing its plan, purpose, provisions and presentation. A world-loving God would not limit His affection, nor could He be partial in His dealings since He is no respecter of persons.

“Christ died for all,” Paul strongly contended, and the ministry in which he was engaged carried God’s offer of mercy, conceded His willingness to forgive and conveyed a heavenly hope to all men everywhere. This mammoth global undertaking called for a united ministry, made necessary because “there are diversities of gifts . . . and there are differences of administrations . . . and there are diversities of operations” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Paul sowed, Apollos watered.

- Some may preach while others teach;

- Some may evangelize while others edify;

- Some may counsel while others comfort;

- Some may go to the field while others “stay by the stuff.”

If all are faithful with their several gifts, there will be a blending of contributions to produce results that are pleasing to the Lord of the Harvest.

It is a possessed ministry.

The infinite God has signally honored us by placing in our hands a ministry that does miracles. It is not of future bestowment; it is a present possession. We now have it.

- Whether clearly defined in our thinking or ill-defined, we have it.

- Whether highly valued or lightly disparaged, we have it.

- Whether actually accepted or mentally rejected, we have it.

It is something from which we cannot detach ourselves. It is one of the practical accompaniments of our “so great salvation.” It carries a responsibility of indefinable weightiness, which, if

discharged, produces a present joy and promises a prospective reward; but, if ignored, it will hound us to our dying day and will visit us with loss at the judgment seat of Christ.

This ministry is some others' opportunity of heaven held in our trust. When we think of it in these terms, it becomes a matter of solemn moment. What is a ministry but an opportunity to be useful, the privilege of being a blessing to others-the chance to prove that our life has not been in vain; but the ministry to which Paul refers adds unspeakable importance to this general idea of service.

It is as though the Lord in His infinite graciousness were saying, "Unto you who are Mine is committed the privilege of being My ambassadors-bearers of heavenly cargoes, covering the globe with the most needful of all necessities, the message of life and hope with all its transforming power and blessing, and they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever."

That the Christian has a ministry is undeniable.

He may do little about it, but he cannot gainsay his Scriptural responsibility. No one ever seemed to question the fact that the Apostle was a servant of God. Everyone about him knew that he had a ministry. This was true of all those pioneers of the faith. It was definitely true of the martyrs. They were given the choice of denying or of dying. They preferred death because their faith was their life. They could not give it up. Christ was everything to them. They continued their ministry until the burning fagots brought their spoken testimony to a close, and then their martyrdom spoke for them and speaks still.

An earnest Christian who knows anything about obedience to the Lord should react like Peter and John, even under attempted suppression. They declared, "we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." This is a testimony to a possessed responsibility that must be discharged. This ministry is equally unalterable.

The commission is the same today as of old. The things of the Lord do not change as the fashions of men.

- The lost are just as lost as ever.

- God's love is just as wonderful.

- The gospel is just as powerful.

- Heaven is just as alluring as ever, and hell is unchangeably horrible.

God still saves men by the foolishness of preaching.

- It may be from the lips of a pastor, evangelist or Sunday School teacher.

- It may be through a loved one in the home.

- It could be through a gospel tract carefully delivered or through a letter prayerfully written, but the Word must be presented.

It is the seed from whence new life emanates. If the ministry were not of God, it might change with the fluctuations and innovations of men; but since it is of God, it is immutable-in keeping with His own unchangeableness.

Not only is this possessed ministry undeniable and unalterable, but it is also definitely non-transferable.

Each servant was responsible for his own pounds while the master was away, and each of us is likewise responsible to Him Who said, “Occupy till I come.”

We may think we have transferred our ministry by letting another do what the Lord has called on us to perform, but not so. The books one day will be opened. Paul had once planned to go on a journey into Bithynia, but the Spirit let him know that the divine plan called for an expedition toward Europe. He might have sent Silas in his stead, but he could not have done so and have been obedient to the Lord. The present-day seriousness connected with this thought is that so many seem content with the belief that someone else will do all that is required to make Christ known in the world. This is grossly erroneous. There is something for each one to do.

“Somebody needs you somewhere, Somebody needs me too;

Somebody needs a word you can say, Some deed that you only can do.”

It is a perceived ministry.

Paul took for granted that the believers whom he was addressing had a clear vision of Christian responsibility, for he said, “Seeing we have this ministry.”

It is most apparent that the vision of God’s people today is sadly distorted. This is one characteristic of apostate days. Satanic deception plays havoc with spiritual perception; but the thought before us suggests the possibility of perceiving it, so that no one can plead inability of discernment.

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17).

It is incumbent upon those who receive Christ as their own personal Saviour to follow the example of Paul, with the same sincerity and earnestness, in ascertaining the will of the Lord. Definiteness should not cease when one reposes faith in His Saviourhood but should ever continue in a constant acknowledgment of His Lordship.

- Samuel said, “Speak Lord for thy servant heareth.”

- David requested, “Teach me Thy way; lead me in a plain path.”

- Isaiah volunteered, “Here am I, send me.”

These are but a few indications of how many have perceived their debt of love to Him and have laid their all on the altar of service. They have been victors; they have held the banner high; they have waged the battle for righteousness; they paid the price and anticipated the reward, while others allowed their eyes to be dimmed by self-interest, their minds to be dulled through self-will, their hearts to be hardened by deceit, only to suffer eternal loss when the books are opened. Oh, for eyes to see and minds to understand and hearts to be willing to choose, while we may, the better thing for His glory and our good. It is decidedly plain enough for us to perceive.

How much we owe to the clear-sightedness of the beloved Apostle we shall never fully know this side of the veil. One thing is most evident as we study his life; he furnishes a godly incentive and

gives to us an impetus in our engagements for the Lord.

His was an accurate perception, an enlightened vision. He had to be able to detect the leading of the Spirit in order not to run ahead nor to lag behind. If he could know God's will, then others could; if others could, then we can. Perceiving God's will for our lives is not the enigma Satan has led us to believe.

A simple syllogism might be cited.

God's will may be known by those who will to know it. If we have the will, we shall know.

To one who might have lightly said, "I do not know what God would have me to do," the Apostle would have impatiently retorted, "Preposterous!" In all those arduous and extensive missionary sojourns, Paul had to develop an accuracy in perceiving the will of God because he was an agent for Him. Something within us would cry out against an intimation that a divinely designed ministry should be carried on according to the flights and fancies of man's imagination or by the best promptings of man's imperfect judgment. No, God's work must be done in God's way to have God's blessing. Let us learn to be more accurate in perceiving His will.

The very attitude of Paul's Christian conduct gives credence to the fact that it was an approved perception. When it became clear that God was leading in a certain manner, Paul stood out almost singularly as one servant who did not make excuse. Nor did he plead inability or procrastinate before beginning the job. In acknowledging God's way, one willingly and readily allows God's plan to take precedence over one's own desires.

It is an admission, always, that God's way is both right and best. Someone has said, "There is no success outside the will of God and there is no failure within." An approval of divine leading is a belief in the truth of this proverb. Paul never saw anything but folly in raising a "why" or "wherefore" when the Spirit made the plan clear. He seemed to favour the fact that man has absolutely no right to his own opinion when God has once spoken on a matter. Otherwise, the authority of God would be in question. His own plans could easily be discarded in deference to God's way.

It is interesting also to note that it was an appreciated perception which Paul had for the ministry entrusted to him. He was glad when his heavenly Father would say, "This is the way, walk ye herein." It gave him the confidence of being in the right course and it brought him assurance of heavenly guidance. How easy to serve under such conditions. With what greater fortitude one may meet the enemy, as meet him we will in the Lord's service.

When Samuel was yielding to Israel's demands for a king, he reasoned with them, saying, "The Lord advanced Moses and Aaron." By this he meant that only God can give advancement and will do so if we perceive His will and follow His way. That means the enemy must give ground that impassable barriers must collapse, that irksome problems must disappear and that victory is assured.

It is a particular ministry. "Therefore, seeing we have THIS ministry . . ."

Whatever else this grammatical demonstrative meant to others, it was freighted with the greatest significance in the mind of Paul. The Galatian believers had good reason to believe this some two years previously when the Apostle wrote them a strong letter with his own hand warning them

about confusing the Christian message with other religious thinking of the day. What Christ offers needs no alteration, addition or subtraction, nor yet to be complemented by some concoction of man. It is unique and must not be confused with counterfeits which are sure to be evolved by the sower of tares. One can almost sense the unusual emphasis with which he enunciated the words, “this ministry.”

Doubtless his first thought was that it contrasted the law. The word “therefore” in the text at once suggests some antecedent fact or factor, and thus carries us back to the preceding chapter; namely, second Corinthians three. There, the Apostle made a forceful differentiation. He drew a contrast between the old covenant and the new. He showed that the former was of the letter; the latter of the Spirit. The one was a ministration of death; the other a ministry of life. The old was glorious; the new transcendently glorious. The old was done away; the new is still in vogue. Moses was prominent in the former; Christ fills the latter. He laboured the point that “God hath made us able ministers of the new testament” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Then, Paul wanted to make unmistakably plain that this ministry concerned the lost. This is one prominent reason why it concerned him. This is why it should eminently concern every Christian.

It is the ministry that brings to men the message of the cross. Thus, it is that which concerned God when He gave His only begotten Son. It is that which concerned Christ when He endured the cross, and despised its shame. This ministry is redemption’s release, the lifeline of hope to a world of men drowning in the deceitfulness of sin. To have a ministry of such transcendent importance seemed to overwhelm the Apostle. He was not a bigoted, biased and unbalanced individual because he was determined to know nothing among the Corinthians save Christ and Him crucified. He was merely giving evidence of the fact that his conversion had placed him in the very center of the most awe-inspiring, heart-subduing and soul-thrilling ministry. He was now, in the sufficiency of God (2 Corinthians 3:5), an able minister of a matter that spelled hope for all who were lost in darkness and sin.

The aims, ends and processes of this ministry involved not only a hope beyond the grave but also a help for those who must meet the vicissitudes of this life. It comforts the living.

To the tempted, Paul could say, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

To the afflicted he could testify, “I sought thrice for relief, and the Lord assured me His grace was sufficient for me.”

To those bereft of loved ones, with hearts pierced through with grief, he could relate the facts about the blessed hope of Christ s return, and then add, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

From every angle of vision, this was a wonderful calling and worthy of the approval and appreciation of every Christian.

It is a propitious ministry.

In his masterful appeal, Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that “we have received mercy.” God had found a way to be merciful to all who would receive mercy since Christ became a propitiation for our sins, but it is this ministry that brings the knowledge of that truth. It is therefore a ministry of mercy. What he was saying is not obscured. He was pleading for performance of their ministry, the discharge of their God-given responsibility, and the very fact that someone brought them the message should prove a strong motivating force in sending them on to others with the same news which led to their own salvation. Advisedly, this was a most effective challenge.

Of all that we have received from the Lord, we have deserved nothing.

It has all been in the mercy of God through Christ by the work of the Spirit. It brings us pardon which involves a full, unqualified, eternal forgiveness of our sins. It involves a freedom from the domineering, degrading and disastrous grip of Satan. “He whom the Son sets free is free indeed.”

This ministry likewise brings us peace which is the product of justification. We are not only loosed from Satan’s grasp but lifted into a position of fellowship with God. Peace is the pleasant assurance that all is well with one’s soul, condemnation having been withdrawn and sweet contemplations of glory filling the mind with a gladdening effect. We “tried in vain a thousand ways, our fears to quell, our hopes to raise” until we heard of Jesus Christ and His salvation. Then, came peace through Him.

This ministry also brings us power. It puts us in contact with the source of power. That which made Paul so tireless and effective was the power of God. It enabled him to triumph over the world, the flesh and the devil.

All of this, together with every blessing which Calvary purchased, would be the holy, happy possibility for all men if those who have received mercy would tell others.

It is a pressing ministry.

It must have been with more than usual firmness that the Apostle enunciated the words, “We faint not.” The literal translation may make this appeal more practical -“We do not give up.” More freely, “We press on!”

Such an expression was consonant with Paul’s very character. After he surrendered to Christ, even kings and magistrates could not coerce him to capitulate. The devil tried in many disguised manners to bring him to a halt, but still he pressed on. Men were dying in their sins without God and without hope-their end was destruction-only Christ could help them.

In the British empire, there is a slogan which reads, “The king’s mail must go through.” This is how Paul felt about the King’s message-it MUST go through!

This stimulating, irresistible challenge, ringing down through the centuries, comes to us with the freshness of those undying qualities of divine truth, quick and powerful, ready to pierce any receptive heart.

We, too, have a ministry. It is a like ministry. It calls for the same wholehearted acceptance and faithful fulfillment which were accorded it by the exemplary Apostle, whose natural qualifications were by no means exceptional, but who had a great heart of love for his Lord and a broken,

bleeding heart for men without the Saviour. These two simple factors made him profoundly great.

A little more actual love for Christ and a little more real love for the lost, then, we, too, would press on-on as we know we should in those prayerful moments of our lives-on as the day demands-on as would be pleasing to Him “Who loved us and gave Himself for us.”

Let us press on!

~ end of chapter 5 ~

01.06 Paul's Belief In The Blessed Hope

CHAPTER SIX PAUL'S BELIEF IN THE BLESSED HOPE

"Looking for that Messed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13)

Paul was not an extremist for the simple reason that he majored only in the revered tenets of the faith, not one of which is susceptible to over-emphasis. All are important and all are profound. Had he stressed certain doctrines to the exclusion of others, his would have been an unbalanced theology. But he was a genius in matters of proportion and perspective, each precept in his pedagogical presentations assuming its rightful relation to the divine economy as a whole.

The second coming of Christ received a perceptibly impressive treatment in his letters of instruction. It was to him a towering truth, the magnitude of which should afford the greatest of inspiration for the people of God. Its practical value was clearly developed in his epistles.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as an incentive to holy living.

With all the subtle and deceptive evil devices which lie in ambush along the Christian's journey, any encouragement to press on is to be welcomed. Of course, there are many encouragements. To uphold the dignity and honour of the family of God, to be a challenge to the wayward, to win the lost and hopeless, to anticipate the reward of the faithful-all these prove invaluable as an impetus to godly exercise; but to contemplate a face-to-face meeting with the Lord of Glory, the spotlessly pure One, the Lover of our soul, is incomparable as an appeal to holiness in the realm of earnest Christian practice. The Apostle John reminds us that it could well be a time of regrettable shame if we are not abiding in Him.

In counseling the Thessalonians, Paul made this passionate plea:

"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love. . . to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

Unblameable holiness is contingent upon established or stabilized hearts.

Love is the means to such an end and the appearing of Christ is the incentive. In this whole coveted experience, the Lord is the able Agent. The part which the believer plays is simple when once sincere willingness begins to operate.

With his eyes upon the Holy One, the Christian begins a voluntary dismantling of the false or fleshly structures in his life, a denouncing of the dissimilitudes.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Such a housecleaning is the invitation for the divine Agent to enter with His pure and wholesome furnishings, visiting the life with a manifestation of Himself. In view of the certainty of the Lord's coming, Paul urged upon all Christians a thorough dedication and a complete yieldedness.

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness," he contended, "but unto holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

Paul looked upon the Parousia as an inducement to patience.

Patience is undeniably a virtue, while impatience is a common trait, and readily provoked. Paul witnessed the hindrance of impatience in the testimony of many in his day. With John Mark, the road was too long. With Demas, it was too narrow. The former forsook Paul and the latter forsook the Lord, all through impatience. The children of Israel, in their wilderness journey were impatient when they desired the meal of Egypt in preference to the menu of Jehovah. These same people were impatient because Moses delayed his return from communing with the Lord on the mount, and demanded gods of Aaron.

Achan was impatient when he coveted the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold. Had he waited a few days, he might have enjoyed even more in the conquest of Ai. This treacherous trait has exacted an appalling toll down through the years and is, today, most prevalent among God's people.

Impatience,

- Curtails training,

- Hinders answers to prayer,

- Jumps at conclusions,

- Fosters ill-feeling,

- Foments rage and

- Gives up in despair.

Patience may either be forced or induced.

We are scripturally informed that tribulation worketh patience, and the trial of one's faith produces a like result. However, there is a precious inducement which is far better.

"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

Here, Paul shows to us something of the present, practical value of belief in the second coming. By the word "waiting", he meant to convey the thought of full expectancy, a definite looking for the Lord.

A passive, half-hearted assent to the doctrine, as such, does not produce patience; but he who believes with his whole being in the assurance of this glorious event, finds it to be a soul stabilizer. And what is patience but a calm inward resignation to the Lord, regardless of the situation, knowing that He will make all things right at His coming. The Apostle expressed the thought in

different words when he testified, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Let us apply Paul’s formula and wait patiently for the Lord.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a stimulant to action.

Whether or not the plural imagery disqualifies the five wise virgins from typifying the Church, it nevertheless remains true that the second-coming message aroused them out of their slumber and stirred them to action. There is a time to sleep but there is also a time to wake and to work. Our day has had no parallel for such a pronounced “off schedule” complex. People are shifting when they should be sleeping, rushing when they should be resting, playing when they should be praying.

That the Church has suffered through conformity to the world is without argument. While the world is all-out for pleasure, the Church has all but gone into leisure, until a Rip Van Winkle sleep has clamped a quietus upon the passionate urge to draw men into the Ark of Safety. The slumber of believers is too sound to be interrupted by present-day pastoral appeals, and their complacency is too deep to permit the cries of the lost to register.

Paul waxed dramatic in his alarm over the indifference of believers in his day.

Rising to the fullest height of his persuasiveness, he appealed, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore CAST OFF the works of darkness, and let us PUT ON the armour of light” (Romans 13:12).

It has been a night period ever since the Sun of Righteousness went down behind Calvary’s mountain. He came as “a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Israel” (Luke 2:32). A Gentile government gave its consent to extinguish the light and the sons of Israel heaped indignities ingloriously upon Him.

Jesus, Himself, declared “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” He is no longer in the world, bodily. He ascended through the heavens to sit as a glorified man at the right hand of God in the most excellent glory. His going brought the assurance of His certain return as two witnesses affirmed, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

If, in Paul’s day, the night period seemed far advanced, how much farther has the night progressed? Surely it has gone through the even watch, the midnight watch, the cockcrowing-perhaps, we are well along in the morning watch. The wise and always dependable Apostle insists that “It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Romans 13:11). Since Christ is our salvation, then He Himself, in His coming, is nearer than when we accepted Him as our Saviour.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a time of rejoicing.

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?” he asked. “Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

This is a superb expression of sacred sentiment. Paul was thwarted in many attempts to visit the saints at Thessalonica although his desire was expressed as great. In company with Silas and Timothy, he was detained at Corinth, from which point he wrote his earliest epistle which he commanded to be read to all the brethren. He lamented his separation from them, but assured them it was in presence only and not in heart. Then, he once again relied upon the advent doctrine for some timely comfort, writing that all remorse would become rejoicing at the coming of Christ.

Scarcely more than a hasty perusal of the foregoing quotation is necessary to detect a similarity between Paul and his wonderful Lord, “Who for the joy that was before Him, endured the cross.”

Prisons, stocks and flogging posts were hardly to be accounted with such a day in prospect, a day that would reveal the unbounded rejoicing of men in the glory, saved by the grace of God, all because a faithful servant on earth was willing to run the gauntlet of evil forces to tell them Jesus saves.

There, in the presence of a joyful Saviour and before a rejoicing band of sinners he had pointed heavenward, Paul knew he would be filled with eternal exultancy. The blessed hope proved a bulwark to the beloved Apostle because disappointment disappeared in the promise of its joyful compensation.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as the time of surcease from groaning.

It may seem like an unpardonable paradox to term believers free men in bondage; and, yet, Paul looked longingly for the day when we “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). The thralldom of decay will yield to the enjoyment of the liberty attending the glory of Christ’s return. Now the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, for the two are contrary one to the other. The tendencies of the flesh are toward the beggarly elements and away from God. In this realm of change and decay, there is much everywhere to aggravate this condition. This whole world lies in the evil one, and the eyes must see sin in much of its manifestation and the ears must hear much that is distressing and distracting. Thus, there is a groaning within for the time of sweet release-the time of His planning, the time of His coming.

Paul saw a restlessness in creation that suggested a groaning for the lifting of the curse, a restoration of Eden’s glorious character.

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fading together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy . . .” (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Paul said, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). No one knew better than the Apostle the many wonderful aspects associated with Christ’s return. It was because of his heavenly enlightenment and firmness of faith that he could joyfully call it “the blessed hope.”

Paul looked upon the Parousia as the terminus of the Lord’s Table.

As Paul touched upon the solemn and sacred remembrance of the Saviour's atoning death, he laid special stress upon the fact that his instructions came direct from the Lord Himself (1 Corinthians 11:23). He related how the Lord Jesus informed him about the circumstances incident to the inception of the memorial feast- the betrayal, the bread, the blessing, the breaking, His body, His blood, the cup and the covenant.

How impressive it must have been to Paul, that he should receive a recital of such sacred facts from Him Who was the very center of the matter. Second only to the privilege of being present at the table the night of its institution was the rare honour of gaining a descriptive report from the divine source. This enabled Paul, the eminent advocate of church polity and practice, to teach and to encourage the observance of the supper which was an exceptional joy to him.

"For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup," he solemnly intoned, "ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

A proper observance, then, is substantially a symbolical proclamation of the Saviour's sacrificial death.

It is to draw our hearts back to Calvary for a renewed appreciation that it was for our sakes He was "put to death in the flesh" and that His blood was shed for the remission of our sins. The blessedness of "breaking bread" with believers has had its ennobling effect upon the true Church these many long years; and yet, today, the sublime associations are just as tender and touching.

Sincere hearts are searched and dedicated lives are deepened as those in the Lord feast upon Him, looking back to the cross and forward to the coming when the new covenant in His blood shall issue in full fruition and the reserved and fadeless inheritance shall be realized. These holy meditations and happy contemplations are inspired by the ordinance of remembrance and the unseen but promised presence of the true Bread of Heaven. The memorial continues "till He come." Being with Him will obviate both the value and meaning.

We meet as those who love the Lord

To take the bread and wine, The ground-up grain by fire baked,

The crushed fruit of the vine.

For these betoken Him Who bore The heat of wrath divine;

Who felt the bruise for sin's dark curse, And saved this soul of mine.

We break the bread and drink the cup,

And bow our hearts in prayer;

It was not for Himself He died-

Our guilt had put Him there.

And then we lift our souls in joy, For symbols He'll replace,

When for His purchased bride He comes And we behold His face.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a mystery.

As Paul approached the climax of his classic on the resurrection, he tightened his grip upon the Corinthians' interest by asserting, "Behold, I show you a mystery" (1 Corinthians 15:51).

This was a fascinating introduction to the captivating capstone of Christian expectation -the coming of the Lord. It was, in a sense, an exception to his resurrection doctrine, for the coming of Christ will cancel death for the believers then living; and, with the removal of death for them, resurrection will be obviated. But his main contention here has to do with the supernatural accompaniments.

His revelation of the mystery shows a cataclysmic change.

This will consist of:

(1) the dead being raised incorruptible;

(2) the living putting on immortality.

It will transpire "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." It is a mystery which lends itself to explanation without losing its supernatural complex. In a multiplicity of manners, the second coming is consonant with victory which it so strongly bespeaks

"Then shall come to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

Death with its sting will then be eternally abolished for those who took refuge in the procurements of the death of Christ, and the grave will relinquish its prey even as the tomb released its Divine Occupant.

- It will be the glorious Victor in His triumphant march against the last enemy to be put under foot, the one which plagued His bride in her pilgrim journey.

- It will be a victory for the Saviour;

- It will be a victory for the saved.

In the midst of his revelation of this mighty mystery, the Apostle personifies despicable death and the grim grave, and demands, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The resurrected saints and the changed believers in their heavenward transport may concertedly propound these unanswerable queries; but not until the mystery transpires will the time for this interrogation be ripe.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a means of uniting the family of God.

When Paul referred to the family of God as being "in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:15), he was acknowledging his acquaintanceship with broken family circles.

Into many homes, where his travels carried him, there were vacant places and wounded hearts. Some loved ones were with the Lord while others yet journeyed on in the course. Such farewells are frequent, putting some members beyond the veil of human contact though not beyond sovereign surveillance. What news could be more welcome than that of a great reunion with

departed loved ones and the localizing of the household of faith in fairer environs never again to be torn asunder? This is what Paul saw in prospect at the appearing of Christ.

How wonderful and how encouragingly informative are the apostle's commentaries on eternal matters. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep," he advised, "that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Then, he presented what he assayed as being a most precious phase of the blessed hope, how "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven" to raise those who died in Him and to catch up the believing ones who then remain.

It will be a climactic, coordinated operation with a meeting in the air and a never-to-be-severed union with the glorious Head of the Church. Tears will forever cease and grief will eternally go. Our home will be celestialized, our house will be immortalized and our hope will be realized. This is why Paul could commend the message of Christ's return as words of comfort for one another. This is why it was to him the glorious appearing and the ever blessed hope. It is the appointed time for Christ to change these our bodies of humiliation and to fashion them like unto His own body of glory. If cold unbelief raised a question as to how these things could be, Paul had the answer-

"According to the working whereby He is ABLE even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Php 3:21).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

01.07 Paul And Prevailing Prayer

CHAPTER SEVEN PAUL AND PREVAILING PRAYER

“I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8) The bent posture of a humble suppliant is the symbol of spiritual greatness, for success in the field is contingent upon frequency at the Throne. He who looks to God for wisdom works more wisely and wins the greater battles, for those who wait upon the Lord not only renew their strength, but mount up on wings as eagles. It is incumbent upon a Christian to walk and not faint. It is optional to run and not be weary; but if soaring is a possibility, nothing less could suffice for that eager, energetic, spirit-filled Apostle of old.

The Pauline principle of ministerial procedure coincided identically with that of his blessed Lord. Jesus went out to pray, then came forth to preach. “Arising up a great while before day, Jesus went out and departed into a solitary place and there prayed.”

This made prayer precious to Paul-precious because He Who is the believer’s preciousness elevated it to an unimpeachable eminence in that solitary but sacred spot long centuries ago. Few people underwrite their evaluation of prayer with such pronounced action. Few will corroborate their claim to its importance by such inconvenience. Ere you left your room this morning did you think to pray? What we need most of all in these critical days of increasing unrest is a better acquaintanceship with our lovely Lord in a simple, satisfying manner. Too much do we find ourselves in the throes of a technical determinism with our faith and practice reduced to certain fixed formulae, so foreign to the Word of Life.

Paul was noticeably like his Lord in many admirable ways. Nor was prayer an exception. He did not pen the largest amount of New Testament truth, but he wrote more about prayer than all the others.

To the Ephesians, he testified, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father.” Paul did not boast about a life of prayer; he simply prayed. The results of his life were proof enough that he tarried often and long where the human soul comes into contact with the divine Presence, there to be endued with wisdom and imbued with strength sufficient for every need.

He could well have said, “I sought Him early Whom my soul loveth and I found Him.” It is hardly accurate to claim that prayer is the secret of a spiritually useful life. There is no secret to it. He Who prays proves its power by producing results. Any one may pray who will, and he who would emulate his Lord, does. Paul was one such individual.

The possibilities through prayer have never been completely assayed.

- Prayer prepares us for progress.

- Prayer presents us with privileges.

- Prayer provides us with power.

- Prayer promotes us in holiness.

All the greatest needs both of the Church collectively and of its members individually may be grouped under one heading -the need for a higher standard of godliness. And the all-embracing cause of a truly godly character is close and constant contact with the unseen God. Such a contact is learned and practiced, as nowhere else, through supplication and intercession- where the human spirit waits upon the infinite Presence, learns to recognize Him Who is spirit, and cultivates His acquaintance and fellowship.

Paul's prayer for abounding love.

Down in a dull prison, closely guarded by alert servants of the state, cut off from the world without, Paul penned a letter to the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. The sweet winsomeness of his godly spirit permeated the epistle which bore his kindest remembrances to them. Affections cannot be chained nor can prayer be hindered by a standing guard. In spite of all the points of contact in the Apostle's many travels, he assured the Philippians that they had a place in his every prayer. He deemed it a joy to make requests of his heavenly Father on their behalf. Thus, in the midst of his own afflictions, he became greatly solicitous of their welfare.

The Apostle was neither superfluous nor superficial. Purpose always predominated his actions. Even in this epistle, written as it was under extreme difficulty, he stressed a needful factor vital to the growth and well-being of any assembly of believers.

"And this I pray," wrote their beloved friend, "that your love may abound yet more and more" (Php 1:9).

He believed this prayer would be answered. At least, he knew that God was able to make such a spiritual condition possible if the people would meet the requirements. Paul explained in the Roman epistle that the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of believers by the Holy Ghost, making them possessors of such love. But, they were not to be possessors only but promoters also.

The figure commonly used for the word "abound" and its several derivatives was that of a vessel under a hydrant with the water rising to the brim, there to overflow or abound. The overflowing love would inspire fellowship and promote fruitfulness. Abounding love can drown grievances, hurdle obstacles, overcome difficulties and inundate selfishness.

He prayed that these believers might be "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ." This required abounding love. With such holy petitions being placed before the Throne of Grace, he brightened the dull hours of prison life.

Paul's prayer for overcoming power.

With all of the exceptional spiritual traits which made his life so rich and beneficial, the Apostle was human enough to long for letters from his friends. When the news was unfavorable, it seemed that his whole heart went forth in counsel and concern. When the news was pleasant, he readily displayed the greatest delight, often giving himself at once to prayer in gratitude to God for the triumphs of the saints. Word from Ephesus, conveying a report of their faith and love, caused Paul to pray with thanksgiving: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love

unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15-16).

He asked the Lord to grant them exceptional wisdom, an enlightened understanding and an appreciation of their hope and inheritance, but the practical need of the moment was for added enablement to press on. Their current spiritual status was good, indeed very pleasing to the Apostle; but they must not become complacent. Life cannot be stagnant and retreat would be reprehensible. Love and faith were in evidence, but both of these qualities permit enlargement.

Paul knew that it was the little farther that would cost them something; but cost what it may, good must not be allowed to preclude the best. Down on his knees went the Apostle and humbly besought the God of all grace to grant them the experiential knowledge of "what is the exceeding greatness of His power" (Ephesians 1:19).

Herein was boldness before the Throne. He was petitioning for them the selfsame power which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus and placed Him high above all principality and power and might and dominion. He went to the proper source. He had a legitimate reason. These Ephesian believers were God's own dear children; and while they wanted to glorify God, they were impotent in themselves. Paul could encourage but he could not empower. He could not be with them due to his incarceration in Rome, but he could pray. This he did with eminent concern that they might be strengthened by divine might to grow in the things of the Spirit and to overcome the factors which were so actively militating against their progress.

Paul's prayer for deeper knowledge.

One particular posture is not prerequisite to power in prayer. Jesus both stood and knelt. Paul prayed under all kinds of conditions, even when his hands were chained to the prison guards; but when praying for deeper knowledge for the Ephesians, he specifically refers to his posture. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

No reason is given; but the subject at hand was so marvellous and so overwhelming that it is possible he was greatly humbled by the vastness of that which he sought. He proceeded in prayer with the same meticulous exactness and manifest wisdom which characterized his other endeavors.

He besought for them increased strength for the inner man by the Spirit, the consciousness by faith of Christ's indwelling presence, and establishment in love. This was but a preface to the main supplication. Then, as a towering giant in the art of prayer, he graciously requested for them a dimensional comprehension which is infinitely boundless.

"That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height . . ."

How awed his own heart must have been to lay such a weighty petition at heaven's door! How awed we too have been, as, through the years, we have sought something to which we might apply these dimensions. Was it love? Seemingly not, for love is treated separately in the following verse. Was it power? Knowledge? Wisdom? Grace? Perhaps Paul had reached too lofty a plane for most of us to follow. Let us say that he was coveting for the Ephesian Christians a clearer appreciation of that vast sphere of privilege into which Christ had brought them by His "so great"

salvation - fathomless and limitless as it is.

Then, he went on to the subject of love.

“And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” he prayed, “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

That this is distinct from the preceding verse is proved by the conjunction which does not unite the clauses coordinately. The break is too decided. The climax of this famous petition is the suggested condition of being filled with the fulness of God. Space does not permit of an extensive treatment of this point, but an experiential acquaintanceship with the greatness of God’s attributes and bestowments in the foregoing verses pave the way to this holy estate. This is why Paul prayed for deeper knowledge.

Paul’s prayer for greater fruitfulness.

Of all the hymns in Paul’s repertoire, he never sang, “Must I go and empty handed, must I meet the Saviour so?” Many will thus go, and they need the challenge of this lovely hymn, but not so with this tireless labourer. Nor did he want others to be fruitless. “We do not cease to pray for you,” he once wrote, “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Colossians 1:9-10).

To the Thessalonians, Paul sent a message in which he advised, “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Once again, it is evident that the walk and the work of the Christian determine his worthiness of such a high and holy calling. The only kind of fruitfulness of which the Apostle had knowledge was the work of faith through the power which God vouchsafes to men. Then, too, God must determine the worthiness, not according to our imperfect measurements, but according to His own perfect standard.

Even in a model church such as the one at Thessalonica, prayer was greatly needed to attain unto such a lofty ideal as pleasing the Lord in their daily conduct. The 15th chapter of John lists three categories of productiveness; namely, fruit, more fruit and much fruit. Nothing short of the highest category could satisfy this great man of God, and to this end he prayed both for himself and others.

Paul’s prayer for blameless preservation.

In first Thessalonians, chapter five, Paul gave a formula for Christian ethics. It consisted of:

- Constant rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 5:16),

- Unceasing prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17),

- Wholehearted gratitude (1 Thessalonians 5:18),

- Obedience to the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19),

- Attention to prophecies (1 Thessalonians 5:20),

- Proving the best by Scripture test (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

- Abstinence from evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

This was not only applicable, but was urged by the Apostle, eliciting the following prayer from his lips: “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

This is a most profound utterance. It suggests the possibility of abuse to the spirit, the body and the soul for which, at the coming of the Lord, the believer will be held accountable. If this prayer of Paul’s is answered with regard to Christians in this now-age, they will exercise much greater care in their several relationships toward God, toward others and toward their own bodies, which form the temple of the Holy Ghost.

The prayer also suggests the possibility of being preserved blameless in each of these three respects, kept by the power of grace from sinning against God, against others and against our own bodies. Only recently a doctor was heard to make the astounding comment that “people, for the most part, are not dying today. Their bodies are rotting away.” The implications need not be laboured. Even though the statement may have been hyperbolical, the suggestion is grievous. Misconduct and bodily abuse are serious matters before the Lord, and this prayer for preservation should be studied with the utmost care.

The Apostle Peter adds a very helpful comment on this subject. It, too, was written in the light of the coming of Christ. “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

“In peace” means to remain calm

Conditions preceding the second advent will be disturbing beyond all description, but while “men’s hearts are failing them for looking after those things that are coming to pass,” the Christian is to have confidence, knowing the day of his redemption draweth nigh.

“Without spot” is a warning to be unaffected by infectious error which will characterize the last days.

“Blameless” signifies the lack of complicity in the propagation of error, freedom from personal practices inconsistent with the standard of holiness.

Christ will see to it that we are faultless when He comes (Jude 1:24); we are to make sure we are blameless.

Paul’s prayer for his countrymen.

After his wonderful conversion, Paul never gave any evidence of being nationalistic. Indeed, because of this fact, he was maltreated by the Jews on his visit to Jerusalem at the termination of his third missionary journey. His chief concern was their salvation and promotion in grace. One of his most frequently quoted allusions to prayer is found in Romans 10:1. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”

This was more a state of prayer than it was a stated prayer. As we follow him in his travels from one point to another, we find him invariably searching out the synagogue, there to plead with heartfelt sincerity for the Jews to accept Christ. It is said that one cannot talk to men for God until one has talked to God for men. This was probably the principle that Paul practiced, which meant that he was continually pouring out his heart in prayer for the light to dawn upon the darkened hearts of Israel's wayward sons. Nor did their indifference and opposition to his message deter him in his praying on their behalf, for the praying was motivated by a strong desire. He knew the emptiness of Judaism. They had no king after rejecting Christ, no Passover lamb, no country which they could claim as their own. The vain ritual in which they indulged brought no comfort and offered no hope. How could he have been sincere and yet not have desired them to find the joy and assurance which filled his own soul. He prayed that they might be saved as, of course, many were through his earnestness.

Paul's prayer for his friends.

While Paul was almost beaten to death at Lystra by unbelieving Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and from Iconium, he returned to these places expressly to hold prayer meetings with those who had confessed Christ. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed, they commended them to the Lord" (Acts 14:23).

A prayer meeting was to Paul a time of soul refreshment and bodily relaxation. It was an atmosphere in which a spiritual mind delights. His pastoral prayers, commending these young believers to the Lord and His protecting grace, must have been long remembered after his departure.

One of the most soul-stirring times he experienced in prayer with friends is found in the last three verses of Acts, chapter twenty.

Paul had sent for the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus.

He gave them wise counsel on pastoral theology, telling them how to serve the Lord with humility of mind, to be faithful, to visit from door to door and to testify both to the Jews and Greeks, giving each the same message of repentance and faith. He told them he had not neglected to preach the whole counsel of God, and was, therefore, free from the blood of all men. He urged them to take heed to feed the flock over whom the Holy Ghost had made them the overseers. How solemn were those moments when he said, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace."

Then, he kneeled down and invoked God's blessing upon them with the utmost tenderness. We could well wish the Holy Spirit might have revealed that prayer, but it is recorded in glory. Tears flowed freely for this was to be his last visit to them. Slowly they accompanied him to the ship. Although it was his last time with them on earth, his prayers continued in their behalf. They were his friends in the gospel. They were his friends in Christ.

Paul's prayer for his enemies.

In Paul's last letter he revealed how Alexander the coppersmith "did me much evil." At that time, he wrote about being "delivered out of the mouth of the lion." His adversaries were truculent and caused him to be greatly inconvenienced and inhumanly treated; but, as did his Lord, so did he: "I

pray God that it may not be laid to their charge" (2 Timothy 4:16).

Of all the unfairness visited upon him he never sought revenge. Under the lash of the whip and the bruising impact of the rod, under the pelting of stones and in the prison stocks, he prayed that his persecutors might be saved. "Bless them that curse you . . . pray for them which despitefully use you."

Who had greater opportunity than Paul to practice the hard things of Christ's holy commands? He stood near enough to dear old Stephen while the martyrdom was being accomplished to hear him say, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." He carried those words in his mind. Hardened as he was at that time, this unusual statement from the lips of a dying man, free of bitterness, full of forgiveness, impressed him much. Then, when his enlightened heart learned that the dying martyr, to whose death he consented, was emulating his Lord that made the matter doubly impressive.

He had many opportunities to test his own forgiving soul, for he had many enemies. He stood this test with the same unswerving genuineness that characterized his Christian life in other respects. No matter how hostile or irate his persecutors became in the infliction of evil punishment upon him, he could look into the face of the One Who met him on the Damascus road and saved his poor soul. Then it was easy, easy by transcendent grace, to pray, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

We may find, as did Paul, that prayer can subdue our tempers and dispositions and introduce to us the more gentle and generous frames of mind, giving a definite conformity to the unseen divine Presence. Prevailing prayer is the result of frequent and faithful soul excursions over the living way which Jesus Christ has dedicated to us, bearing His dear name to the Father Who honors the name of His Son in the granting of our petitions.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

01.08 Paul's Persistent Persuasion

CHAPTER EIGHT PAUL'S PERSISTENT PERSUASION

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11)

Paul was dedicated to the proposition that all men everywhere should have an opportunity of hearing the gospel, and he purposed with deep sincerity of heart to do all within his power to make the glad good news available. He was a pressing protagonist, an ambitious advocate who had nothing but a reckless regard for personal discomfort and inconvenience as he pushed to unprecedented points with the Word of Life. He had an ear to hear the cry of the lost and a heart to pity the fallen sons of Adam's race.

Nothing so challenged him to exercise every faculty as the opportunity to tell others about Christ. Men, to him, were not merely integral parts of humanity, but each had a never-dying soul to be saved. His indomitable purpose was to snatch as brands from the burning each one whom he was privileged to contact.

Preaching was his artful occupation. It called for a specialized usage of the various forms of discourse, and argumentation was made prominent in his gospel presentations. He seemed to possess a natural aptitude for adducing evidence, the material of proof. He did not have time to engage in futile disputations which edify not, but he gladly coordinated his several abilities and divine gifts in a convincing and constant challenge to deluded souls.

Where fair play was respected; his arguments prevailed, and he won for himself the coveted distinction of being the greatest known preacher, excepting his Lord "who spake as never man spake." Of course, it was never purely an academic procedure. He was not interested in the matching of wits; his aim was to reach hearts with the dunamis of the gospel-that marvellous force of recreative potentiality. He knew his subject, had proved its premise and experienced its effect. He was qualified to speak with certainty.

It was the persuasion of reason.

"If one died for all, then were all dead" reasoned the Apostle in his appeal to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:14).

The conclusion was obvious, but it is strange how unspeakably blind people can be with regard to the revealed truth of God. Paul was leading up to the substitutionary work of Christ on Calvary. He wanted them to see that the dead could only live through the Living One's death.

His premise showed what was done and why. Someone died because all were dead, for "God hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

When once this truth dawns with all its sacred involvements, it becomes reasonable that the sinner should acknowledge and accept his Substitute.

He argued further that, “if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost” (2 Corinthians 4:3).

The reality of the gospel was attested by a great cloud of competent witnesses, in which category Paul insisted upon being classed. His point was, that, if men could not see the reality of the gospel, it was due to an obscuring veil upon their hearts precluding a recognition. That is, if it could be experienced and was not being experienced by them, then it was the most reasonable thing to believe there was some hindering force. He pressed home his contention by explaining; that the “god of this age” had established an obscuration lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine through to enlighten their souls with the Light of Life. It would be utterly irrational for any one with the facts available to remain behind this satanic veil and lose the value of heaven’s free and abundant offer of grace.

Paul was confronted with many and varied objections. He was once asked to explain why it was the Jews could be the repository for the oracles of the faith and yet so many of them refused to accept Christ as their own personal Saviour. His quick retort was, “What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” (Romans 3:3).

This same question, adorned in modern apparel, is still a stratagem of Satan. Why do not more highly educated believe? Why is it that more scientists do not endorse and accept the propositions of the gospel? All the composite faithlessness in this highly incredulous world, whether it be of the literate or illiterate, cannot confound the faithfulness of God. Paul pleaded with men to cease their unreasonableness lest they barter away their hope of glory.

It was the persuasion of revelation.

More important than reason is the fact of divine revelation. Reason is faulty and finite, while revelation is factual and infinite. Reason has its place as is proved by Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together saith the Lord,” but such reasoning is on the basis of His written Word.

All that man needs to know relative to God’s plan for his eternal good has been set forth as holy men of old wrote, being moved by the Holy Ghost. Someone has ventured, and rightly so, that one ounce of God’s revelation is worth more than tons of men’s empty speculation. The Word of God is yea and amen-final in wisdom and authority.

God reveals the total depravity of a natural man. In spite of his very obvious observations, the average individual is reluctant to acknowledge this sad status. Paul employed special emphasis in declaring that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). This is a sweeping indictment, solemn and without exception.

Intuitively, this Apostle to the Gentiles anticipated their objection that God was for the Jews only. “Is he the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also” (Romans 3:29).

What revelation to a people alien to the commonwealth of Israel and outside the sphere of covenant relationship! This supersedes reason and transcends human knowledge. Yet, it is a glorious reality, for “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). This covered Jew and Gentile alike and holds out a hope for all mankind.

What eye cannot see nor ear hear, God has been pleased to reveal to His own by His Spirit that “we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12).

This is the great impetus behind Paul’s powerful persuasiveness. He had the revelation. He knew how empty his life would be without Christ and how hopeless. He knew just as well how great was the lack in those who knew Him not as their own all-glorious Lord. Thus, he placed before men the awe-inspiring Truth as it came from God, that in its Light, they might find their way out of the darkness of unbelief.

It was the persuasion of love.

Paul rivaled the Apostle John in his dissertations on love. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love],” he declared, “I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.”

It was love, then, that gave the fine tone quality to his ministry which was meaningful and memorable, though militant and sometimes misunderstood. What men were prone to call excessive enthusiasm in his ministry elicited from him the comment, “For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause, for the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Corinthians 5:13-14).

This was the propulsive force which sent him through untold hardship to lay the message of love at the door of men’s hearts. Nor was he content to leave it there. He knocked at the door and besought an earnest reception of his message, pleading, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Love can accomplish what force can never attain. Hardened hearts of criminals have been broken by a touch of love when force had driven them to the depths of viciousness. Authenticated records corroborate this statement.

Paul wanted men to know about the love of all love, the love that was divine, the love that melts calloused hearts, the love that awakens latent affections in our souls.

Men may be partial in their display of affection and variously influenced, “but God,” Paul contended, “commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Through the persuasiveness of God’s love and the winsomeness of the Holy Spirit, Paul became the human agent in the salvation of great numbers of people.

It was the persuasion of necessity.

This was both subjective and objective. “For though I preach the gospel,” Paul confessed, “I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

- It was necessary in order to discharge, even partially, the heavy debt he felt upon his heart for the soul salvation of all men.

- It was necessary to satisfy his own heart that he was doing the Lord’s will which was always paramount in his mind.

While he was considered the apostle to the uncircumcision, or the Gentiles, it was necessary, according to divine plans, for him to go first to the Jews. One sabbath day, in the midst of a large congregation, some of the Jews became envious and openly contradicted the messengers of God. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, “It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).

Objectively, the apostle was driven to evangelize because of the unspeakable need for the gospel. He saw those who were bound by Satan, whose glory was their shame and whose end was destruction. What they needed above all else was Christ and His power to save. Evil men and seducers were waxing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The devil was ensnaring men, leading them captive at his will and trafficking in their blasted hopes. To such deluded souls, the Apostle cried with alarming concern, “Christ in you is the hope of glory. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

How could any Christian, who has any degree of vision, be complacent when people are plunging at the rate of five thousand an hour into eternity and only a very small percentage is prepared to reach heaven. No evangelist has excelled the beloved Paul in showing the great necessity for salvation. He pressed the claims of Christ with convincing logic and constraining sincerity. He pleaded for an immediate decision, saying, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

It was the persuasion of exclusiveness.

Copyrights and patents are legal guarantees for the coveted exclusiveness which people claim for their inventions and productions. Such rights are often violated and the products imitated, but who could claim for his wares what Paul could aver for his message: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-5).

And the convincing point inheres in the fact that it will ever be so, “for there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Paul’s able colleague had very aptly treated of this matter in an address before the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem when he insisted, “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). This exclusiveness of the message was of decided value to Paul and gave him the advantage always. What men needed above everything else had but one source and was obtained in one way only. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6).

- Adam and Eve tried to make aprons of fig leaves;

- Isaiah’s people sought to weave webs of good works;

- Judaizing doctors advocated a mixture of law and grace at Galatia, but these are spurious and profitless.

There is but one way. While the means are exclusive, the offer is inclusive. It is not God’s will “that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Paul was constantly pointing the lost to Christ who died for our sins and Who, alone, can cleanse the guilty and grant peace and pardon. He knew how Satan had cleverly established allurements which distorted the vision and corrupted the understanding; and, while facts are sometimes hard to face, he told them, “There is none that understandeth . . . they are all gone out of the way” (Romans 3:11). He only has life who has Christ, for Christ is the only Saviour and the only source of salvation. This was Paul’s appeal.

It was the persuasion of responsibility.

“He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

This was but one of a series of important questions which Paul raised before a Roman audience. He was showing the amplitude of God’s provisions. God makes His abundant blessings available but man must appropriate them. This is ever a nontransferable responsibility.

No one, however willing, can believe on Christ for another, thereby making salvation possible. That is why Paul showed the personal, individual claims of the gospel, saying, “If THOU shalt confess with THY mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in THINE heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, THOU shalt be saved.”

King Agrippa seemed to sense the personal responsibility each one has with regard to one’s soul salvation. He withered beneath the telling force of Paul’s personal testimony. Here was a prisoner at the bar of justice, who, instead of pleading for his own life, pressed a plea for the welfare of the judge on the bench.

He related the details of his conversion, how this greatest of all responsibilities was unregretfully discharged by the committing of his soul to the Lord as unto a faithful Creator. His intense earnestness and evident assurance were almost irresistible. The king was moved, moved by inward conviction, noticeably moved as he confessed, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

Paul had witnessed faithfully. He could do no more but express to the king his sorrow that he was not altogether, instead of almost, a Christian. There is but a brief step between the almost and the altogether, yet it is infinite.

“Almost cannot avail;

almost is but to fail.”

There is a great company of “near Christians”, but they are just as lost as those who were outside Noah’s ark. Jesus said to one, “Thou art not far from the kingdom.” He could say that of a great company today who, somehow, are failing to see their solemn and sacred responsibility of caring for the need of their souls, simply by reposing faith in the crucified One. We must persuade men that this is a pressing, personal responsibility.

It was the persuasion of judgment to come. Paul told the Romans “we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth,” and added, “Thinkest thou this, O man . . . that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?”

Then, reaching a high peak in the seriousness of the matter, he emphasized that, by the stubbornness of their impenitent hearts, they were daily laying up in store the wrath that would fall with crushing force upon them in the day of judgment (Romans 2:2-3; Romans 2:5).

It was the future of lost men that animated him so greatly in his evangelistic efforts. He knew that for them, though their eyes were now blinded to the gravity of it all, there was “a certain fearful looking for of judgment,” for “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:27; Hebrews 10:31).

How very rare today, but, oh, how eminently needful, for preachers to exhibit the same heartfelt concern which Paul manifested before the people of Corinth, as indeed elsewhere, in his plea for their salvation. Entreatingly, he enunciated the words, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”

This was not an excuse; it was a reason. He was never vindictive nor apologetic. Knowing the terror of impending judgment was sufficient reason to become intensely exercised for those who were not sheltered from the awful fate that lay ahead. He seemed to sense the indescribable plight of one standing before the Great White Throne, totally unprotected from divine wrath, the name not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, facing the dread Judge of the quick and the dead, there condemned by sins unforgiven and “cast into the lake if fire.”

This grand old friend of sinners was more intensely concerned about people than people were concerned about themselves; but, then, that is what brings the average individual to Christ.

- Someone saw your need before you felt it.

- Someone prayed when you were unconcerned.

- Someone told you about heaven when you did not appreciate the kindness.

God bless the persistent, prevailing persuaders!

- Suppose that extra appeal had not been made.

- Suppose that second approach had not been ventured.

- Suppose those added supplications had not been placed tearfully and lovingly at the Throne.

One thing is crystal clear upon the pages of sacred history, Paul fell in love with Jesus and His heart so bled for those in sin’s fetters that he was willing to spend and be spent, here and there, under all kinds of conditions, beseeching men in Christ’s stead to be reconciled to God.

Go thou and do likewise!

~ end of chapter 8 ~

01.09 Paul's Pastoral Prescription

CHAPTER NINE PAUL'S PASTORAL PRESCRIPTION

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13)

Paul was ever like a wise field general who keeps the offensive moving on all fronts. He, himself, was never recreant. Thus, he desired the utmost stability of all who serve the Captain of our salvation. However terrifying the opposition; the soldier of the cross must not quail. His voice rang out with clarity and firmness as he appealed, "Stand fast, and having done all, stand!"

During the first world war, General Foch issued a similar command. News had reached him concerning the preponderant German forces facing his lines. "Advance is impossible; retreat is unthinkable. Therefore, our position is favorable. Stand!" Yet, however renowned a leader, however inspiring his statements, it would be unmitigated folly to issue such a communiqué to untrained soldiers. Steadfastness is acquired and one usually pays dearly for it.

The Apostle put the matter straight to Timothy. "If thou shalt remind the brethren of these things," he wrote, "thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine."

A good minister, then, is one who trains his forces well. To "remind the brethren of these things" means to drill them well in the fundamentals. But there is always an if of condition.

- A soldier may be strong and able to endure hardship if he trains faithfully.

- An athlete may run well if he exercises constantly.

- An executive may succeed if he is acutely alert.

- A student may excel if he applies himself.

In each case, attention must be given to essentials in order to develop skill and competency.

The Christian servant needs more than the nutriment of doctrine. It has to be transmuted into action. He requires more than the assurance of faith. It must be put into practice. The runner may eat and sleep well, but he must also get on the track and run the laps. The principle is aptly expressed by James, who urged, "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only."

The text is, in reality, an assignment given to young Timothy by Paul who was then absent. The introduction is at once expressive of our Lord, Who said, "Occupy till I come."

The two commands are synonymous. The application is for all Christians. We are, in the absence of the Saviour, to be occupied with His Word, His work and His will. But the importance attached to this threefold ministry is gathered from the manner in which Paul enjoined Timothy to proceed.

The word “give attendance,” [pros-ekh-o] means to devote, to apply oneself or to pay strict attention. That is, it calls for a concentration on or a specialization in certain particular matters. These matters were clearly designated and definitely designed to furnish a well-rounded Christian training which is equally needful today.

The early Christian leaders accomplished much because they dealt in productive essentials. They eliminated the irrelevancies and confined themselves to the Scriptures which are sufficiently able to fully furnish the man of God unto every good work. Today, valuable time is consumed in private study, in conversation among brethren and in convocations in an effort to magnify the theological differences which prevail. There was a day, when men like Paul were determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Give attention to reading.

It would be utterly superfluous to engage ourselves in a lengthy consideration of the value and blessing of the art of reading. He who cannot or does not read suffers irreparably. It is obviously true, however, that the finest of privileges suffer both through disuse and misuse. The art of reading is not excepted.

There is ample reason to believe that the ability to read, being of divine bestowment, is primarily for the purpose of appreciating and appropriating the divine revelations of Scripture; yet multitudes exclude the Bible entirely from their reading pleasure. One wonders if there is not to be found in missionary procedure some object lesson of the basic thought in the mind of God when he made reading possible as an endowment for man.

After years of intensive study in the native dialects, vocabularies are established and elementary laws of syntax and rhetorical procedure outlined. Then, with patience and much perseverance, lessons in reading are taught with one aim in mind-that the natives might peruse the sacred page and learn something of heaven’s message. What else but the law of the Lord did the children of Israel have? We are not contending that acceptable and approved types of literature, other than the Bible, should not be read; but certainly they should not take the precedence, allowing the Holy Book to be relegated to some insignificant place.

Paul’s main emphasis may have been upon public reading. Scrolls were few and reading ability limited. Timothy was to go before the flock, over whom the Holy Ghost had made him the overseer, and read the revelations of Divine wisdom.

This custom had long been followed at that time and had proved profitable.

When the returned remnant of captive Israel entered Jerusalem after the walls and temple had been repaired, “Ezra the scribe stood up on a pulpit of wood . . . and opened the Book in the sight of all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up . . . so they read in the book in the law of God” (Nehemiah 8:4-5; Nehemiah 8:8).

In the little town of Nazareth, Jesus did likewise as He worshipped in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read, “And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah” (Luke 4:17).

This was an indispensable part of Jewish worship. When Paul was invited to preach in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, it was not until “after the reading of the law and the prophets” that he was presented to the congregation (Acts 13:15). This custom is still in vogue. What is more elevating than that of a godly man publicly and reverently reading from God’s Holy Word. There is a fine effect upon the moral feelings also when a congregation of earnest Christians read the Word in concert.

The word which Paul used is anagnosis, which means, literally, “knowing again.” It carries the thought of reading and rereading. What other book would permit of this? For millennia the dear old Bible has been read and reread by the countless numbers who have plodded the narrow road of obedience to God; and, yet today, there is a freshness, a new challenge and a deep blessing for all. Glorious Book this! Paul was laying down a principle in homiletics for young Timothy which has never become obsolete. He was saying something to this effect, “You cannot diagnose the Word of God until you first anagnose it.” It is always well to read and reread before making any attempt to analyze. It was with frequency of doing and faithfulness of devotion that the Apostle was urging him to proceed.

We read the Scriptures for refreshment of soul.

The Word of God is both meat and drink to the one who has been born again. Jesus stated that man must not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. Job testified, “I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

David spoke of thirsting for God even as a deer pants after the waterbrooks. He was longing for the courts of praise, since his predominating desire was to dwell in the house of the Lord. David wrote more about the glory of the Word than any other single, divinely-appointed penman: hence, it is of small wonder he missed the reading which was always the prominent part in their worship. No matter the sorrow, disappointment or burden, there is always refreshment for the longing soul in the exhaustless biblical storehouse of things both new and old. It was Paul’s daily companion and brightened the dark corners into which life’s vicissitudes forced him.

We read the Scriptures for renewal of faith.

They are faith-begetting and faith-promoting. They furnish stalwartness and fortitude for any eventuality. Reading and rereading about the unwavering faith of Paul in turmoil and trial cannot but fill one with an added determination to remain true to the Lord and to do exploits for Him.

The stimulant of Hebrews eleven to the faith of a believer is unexcelled. It is a tonic of rare quality which can inspire a weakened soul to new life and loyalty. One never tires reading of Abel and the faith of his more excellent sacrifice, of Enoch and his faithful walk with God, of Noah and his choice of faith, of Joshua and his Jericho victory through faith, to say nothing of those who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire-an endless delineation of faith’s victories which cannot be tabulated. Such a chapter should be read preparatory to each conquest in which the Christian soldier must engage.

We read the Scriptures for remembrance of love.

The Bible is referred to as God's love letter to man, but the Bible is much more than the concept which such a statement produces. Jesus said, "The words I speak unto you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63).

They carry something of the spirit of Christ and of the life of God. It is indeed difficult at some points in Scripture to distinguish between the written Word and the Living Word. Throughout its pages there is something of the throb of love, a real love, a love that is divine.

- It underlies every warning and fills every promise.

- It moves men to sympathy and pity for the spiritually destitute and motivates them in sacrificial service.

- It opens before our spiritual vision the very heart of God which planned "so great salvation" for us.

- It is the key to Calvary and the answer to all the sorrow which there broke the heart of the Saviour.

- It is the basic meaning of every Christian sacrifice in mission and in martyrdom.

Love permeates the sacred page, and every perusal brings to the reader warmth of its radiance.

We read the Scriptures for a recognition of God's will.

The disciples walked with their resurrected Lord enroute to Emmaus. As they reviewed the wonderful experience and recounted the details incident to it, they testified, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). God talks to us through His Word; and, as we read it or hear it, the Holy Spirit indites to our hearts that which will enable us to know His will. The Bible is God's directive for man; and when we devote ourselves to its reading, we place ourselves in the right position to hear His voice.

"Think of it prayerfully, Study it carefully,

Deep in thy heart let its oracles dwell, Ponder its mystery, Slight not its history,

None can e'er love it too fondly or well."

We read the Scriptures for the richness they furnish.

The 119th Psalm is a lengthy, coordinated testimony to the practical value of the Bible. The Divine statutes afford strength in trial, comfort in sorrow, preservation in temptation, and wisdom in difficulty, filling the mouth with praise and stirring the soul to a deeper dedication. The pregnancy of Scripture is proved by the Holy thoughts to which it gives birth.

To his fellow-believers at Philippi, Paul wrote, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things."

He is rich indeed who abounds in the knowledge of the Word. Devote thyself, therefore, to the reading of its precious precepts.

Give attention to exhortation.

The second part of the Apostle's command to Timothy had to do with what Paul called the paraklesis. This particular use of exhortation meant a "calling near or for," not so much a driving, forcing method of superimposing facts upon unwilling minds and hearts, but rather a passionate plea with a view to drawing the sheep into pastures green, near to the heart of the Great Shepherd.

In 2 Timothy 4:2, exhortation was specifically commanded by Paul who urged that it be done with the utmost patience. People, as a rule, are not quick to dedicate themselves fully to the Lord. The green pastures of God's provision are to be preferred above all other allurements, but true spiritual values can only be proffered to needy hearts by careful and loving challenge.

The good minister of Jesus Christ must constantly remind the flock that there is something better ahead, then graciously urge a pressing on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Satanic obstacles must be surmounted. Christians must be encouraged by an assurance of sufficient grace. Every time one sues for higher territory, each step is contested, but the impelling exhortation is that the Captain of the Lord's host ever leadeth triumphantly. When the glitter of worldliness would dim the true vision, then must the exhorter assure, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

The exhortation is accepted by some, thereby proving the profitableness of such a ministry. Titus is cited as a good illustration. "But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you," Paul explained, "for indeed he accepted the exhortation" (2 Corinthians 8:16).

It is most commendable when the challenge of the Word of Truth is allowed to register in the human heart.

- It is always for man's present edification and his prospective good.

- It brings him face to face with the will of God.

- It opens for him avenues of service and oceans of joy.

- It produces an everlasting gratitude in the willing recipient.

- It rewards the exhorter for his perseverance.

If one will faithfully exhort, and if the people will patiently give audience, the power in the heaven-sent message will sooner or later dissipate indifference and the exhortation will be accepted and practiced with joy.

While it is incumbent upon the servant of God to exhort, and while some accept the challenge, it is stated that the exhortation is forgotten by others. "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children" (Hebrews 12:5).

- This is the harbinger of backsliding.

- This is the reason why Israel went backward.

- This is the reason Demas forsook Paul and turned to worldliness.

- This is why the professing church is so impotent in this hour of the world's greatest crisis.

The exhortation is given, as by a father to his son, in all the kindness and parental love that can be shown. In fact, it is the counsel of God the Father to His children in the family of faith, but it is pushed aside with disinterest and inappreciation. When once we perceive the purpose of God in exhortation, there results a humble acknowledgment that it is "for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). Whether forsaken or accepted, the minister of Christ is duty-bound to exhort with all longsuffering.

Give attention to doctrine.

Here Paul treats of the matter of teaching (did-as-kal-ee-ah). This is the function of doctrine. It is intended to be didactical. Doctrine is the pavement on which dedication operates and is the groundwork of all productiveness in spiritual endeavors. It is the anchor of a steady testimony; hence, a constant necessity. This reveals why Paul commanded Timothy to preach the Word in season and out of season.

Concerning doctrine, the earnest student of the Scriptures will carefully ascertain whether or not there is congruity between the teaching he receives and the orthodox revelations of the Word of God. We must understand that many principles being propounded in our day are unbecoming to sound doctrine.

In Paul's pastoral epistle to Titus, chapter two, verse one (Titus 2:1), he says, "Speak the things which become sound doctrine." Then, in verse seven of the same chapter, he shows three profound factors which are consonant with sound doctrine. "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine showing UNCORRUPTNESS [purity], GRAVITY, SINCERITY."

These are basic factors. Sound doctrine should produce purity, depth, and sincerity in one's life.

Indeed, this is verily the result of faithful proclamation and sincere reception. Paul was a past master in portraying the practical side of Christianity.

One of the strong warnings of Scripture is to beware of contradiction. While there is sound doctrine, there is also unsound doctrine. While there are doctrines of Deity, there are also doctrines of demons. The tares still grow amid the wheat and detection is not easy. With all the contradictory counterfeits which are ever multiplying, the welfare of those not bulwarked by the Word of God is in jeopardy. False teaching is often advanced, not by the addition of error, but by the omission of truth.

The Galatian believers were victims of clever deception which proved most disheartening to the Apostle. False teachers creep in unawares and bid for the confidence of God's people, perhaps through the employment of orthodox terminology. Then, they major in propagating error. The best safeguard, always, is to stress, as did Paul, the teaching of sound doctrine.

Then, with regard to informative teaching which Paul enjoined upon Timothy, we call attention to the matter of cultivation. This word is employed with much careful advisability. Following the martyrdom of James and the persecution of Peter in the days of Herod the tetrarch, it is written,

“the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

When Paul preached with Holy Spirit unction at Ephesus during his third missionary journey, many believed, and “so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed” (Acts 19:20).

This proves the virility of divine truth. Growth, however, requires cultivation if the product is to be the best. If the Word is to enjoy a proper growth and produce the fruit of which it is capable, there must be cultivation. The heart, which Christ termed the soil, must be kept free of the weeds of unbelief, indifference and unforgiveness. Daily prayer will furnish water of refreshment, while constant presentation of truth to others will add strength and stability. Reading, exhortation and teaching furnish the challenge which induces growth in matters of spiritual import. The most prominent factor in the practical aspect of biblical instruction is its operative force. Paul denounced old wives’ fables and discountenanced the vain traditions of the fathers; but, when he proffered advice, it was both workable and profitable. He lived by the faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20), and his life was a convincing attestation to the utility of Scripture. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable . . .” But it must be practiced.

Paul was an ardent advocate of exercise. The rigors of life as he knew it called for the best bodily care. Yet, the importance of physical exercise is dwarfed by the significance of spiritual exercise. “Bodily exercise profiteth little [for a little time],” he reasoned, “but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Chinning the bar, punching the bag, running the laps add strength to the muscles and bolster the health; but reading the Word, exhorting men and teaching doctrine send us down the course with the stride and form of the faithful witnesses who compass us about. The Divine Umpire from the bema takes notice and has a fitting reward ready.

“Attention, please!” echoes the voice of the Apostle, “Specialize in reading, exhortation and doctrine.”

~ end of chapter 9 ~

01.10 Paul Tutors Titus

CHAPTER TEN PAUL TUTORS TITUS “To Titus mine own son after the common faith” (Titus 1:4)

Companionship is clearly cherished by the human heart as one of the richest of life’s endowments. Solitude can be endured when conditions so decree it, but association of the finer sort makes a golden contribution to one’s quest for genuine happiness.

- The miles of a journey are shorter in the company of a friend.

- A task is much the lighter with a partner by one’s side.

- The joys of life are sweeter when shared with another.

- The hours are marked by merry moments in the atmosphere of mutuality.

Nor is this exclusively a terrestrial principle. There are heavenly hosts -companies in the glory, and the Father has the Son at His own right hand.

The Lord sent out the seventy in dual arrangement, while the Holy Spirit suffered Paul to have colleagues in his tireless offensives. In the pioneer push westward with the ever-glorious message, Barnabas faithfully plodded by his side. Silas was his partner on the second journey, while several were in his company on the third. Over marsh and meadow, up the slopes and across the plains, along winding by-paths, in weather fair and foul, this hardy, wholesome gospeller was privileged to enjoy the encouragement of fine, faithful companions. They had knelt in quiet, heavenly communion at many a turn in the road. This was fellowship in the gospel which set the Apostle’s heartstrings vibrating with joyous and unceasing appreciation.

His preaching was with clearer unction and more commanding force when an Epaphras was wrestling at the throne of grace in his behalf. The rigors of a long trek had their compensation in the generous hospitality of Lydia. The bleeding wounds of the lashes and the aching ankles in the tightened stocks were sweetly anaesthetized by the harmony of hymns with Silas lending his voice of praise. The rooting and grounding of novices in the faith was greatly facilitated with people like Aquila and Priscilla assisting. Such associations often gave the dark clouds a silver lining in the Apostle’s varied career, and hours in darkened prisons were brightened as he turned the leaves of memory’s album with sweet reminiscences of faithful fellow-labourers.

Frequent notices inhere in the inspired record of the Apostle concerning a personality greatly esteemed. It was Titus. It would be difficult to accurately and authentically trace the biography of Titus, but it is clear that Paul introduced him to the Saviour, after which he endeared himself to the Apostle as a dependable and trustworthy servant of Christ. Just where he was born and of what his background consisted does not greatly concern us at this point. His name is Roman and it is an established fact that he was a Gentile believer. A strong affection subsisted between the two and each had firm confidence in the other.

After departing from Galatia and enjoying an extended ministry at Ephesus, the apostle proceeded by way of Troas where he confidently expected to meet Titus who had gone on an errand to Corinth. Disappointment through failure to make the contact evoked the humble confession: “I had no rest in my spirit because I found not Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia” (2 Corinthians 2:13). There the contact was established, and Paul observed with the greatest of evident relief, “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Corinthians 7:6).

It was this intimate association and close cooperation which prompted Paul to leave Titus on the island of Crete for a most responsible ministry. In due course, a letter came to Titus from his dearly beloved counsellor, which read in part, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee.”

His was the duty of consolidating the gains which God had so graciously granted their gospel preaching on the island. Loose ends could but mean lost efforts, while care and cultivation would produce growth and its eventual fruitage. Titus was designated as the human instrument in establishing the believers in every city on the Isle. He was not Paul’s special envoy, but rather his chosen substitute.

Paul advised Titus to ordain elders in every town.

The instruction was not to develop or train men for the function of this office. That would have been an impossible task for one man throughout the whole island. Nor was it necessary. The assemblies had qualified individuals. The Holy Spirit sees to it that such is true whenever and wherever New Testament churches gather about and abound in the truths of Scripture. Do you ask “how?” Who knows? Who can tell how one’s daily food builds tissue and bone and hair and fingernails? Just so the Word of Life develops faith, spiritual stamina, prayer ability, wisdom and insight. The Divine Administrator, if unhindered, will furnish an assembly of believers with all that is necessary for their good and for God’s glory.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

It is evident that the Christians on Crete lacked information and instruction with regard to these matters, for Paul was forced to take his leave of them before they received his attention.

It must be remembered that literature did not abound in those days and New Testament Scripture was only then in the process of development. This experience on Crete was an integral part of such revered writings.

It was not uncommon for Paul to meet uninformed but willing folk like the twelve disciples at Ephesus who had never as much as heard about the Holy Ghost. Such must be enlightened; and this is precisely why Titus was left on Crete and why, also, this didactical epistle was addressed to him.

All that lacked Paul’s attention was the appointment of such as were spiritually equipped to take the oversight. This was the duty of Titus who was thoroughly advised in the Pauline instructions now in hand concerning the position, prerequisites and procedure of elders or bishops. The

position has a solemn connotation-“the steward of God.” And the standard was to be, and is yet, high for such a holy calling.

The bishop’s character was to be above reproach, even blameless. He must be the husband of one wife, respected and obeyed by his children. His traits must be free of self-will, quick-temper, inclination toward wine, ready retaliation and greed for gain. He must be hospitable, philanthropic, sober-minded, upright, saintly and self-controlled. He must hold fast the faithful Word in order to exhort believers and to rebuke opponents by the use of sound doctrine. We can readily agree that the instructions were most complete.

Paul urged Titus to restrain Judaisers.

While Paul had taken his departure from Crete earlier than he desired, he nevertheless had remained there sufficiently long to witness the activities of the opposing forces. He called this matter to the attention of Titus, admitting his knowledge of the presence of many disorderly persons given to idle and misleading talk, who, for the most part, were of the Jewish party. The righting field marshal of the early church waxed most austere in this regard and delivered an unequivocal ultimatum-“You must stop the mouths of such men.”

The seriousness of the situation was alarming in the extreme because they were upsetting whole families with false teachings for the sake of making money. They must desist, and Titus was charged with the responsibility of eliminating the subversive forces. With properly appointed elders firmly grounded in sound doctrine, it was not such a mammoth undertaking. Faithful preaching can sound the death knell to false enunciations within any group; and, outside the assemblies, their falsities would have fallen with all the abject lifelessness which characterized them.

Paul had an exceptional capacity to love the followers of Christ, but the premeditated, demoniacal interference of willful subverters engendered within him the strongest detestation. “Cretans are always liars, noxious [evil] beasts, slow bellies [idle gluttons]” he contended (Titus 1:12).

The language was trenchant but truthful. Fables were foreign to the faith of God’s people; and, to make matters all the worse, those who were propagating these extraneous and diversive tales were disobedient men of defiled mind and conscience. Titus was urged to rebuke them sharply.

Paul instructed Titus to stress decorous living for Christians.

Titus may not have been adept in the psychological approaches to human behaviorism. But, then, that was not a too serious deficiency. On this subject, as on all others, Paul was most explicit. The elders, by virtue of their high principles and rigid conformity to the noble standards of divine prescription, could add much to the general Christian atmosphere of the assembly; but it was most essential for all the members to contribute, through proper conduct, to the general appeal of the testimony of the local church and to the strength of its God-given ministry.

Maturity should set an example; for, if experience of age makes any contribution to one’s life, it should deepen the devotion, enrich the testimony and make firm the faith.

“speak thou the things which become sound doctrine,” Paul counseled, “That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of

good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded" (Titus 2:2-6).

These rules, if applied, could not but make for an enviable witness in the higher realm of godly comportment. How lofty were Paul's ideals-how far-reaching his outlook and how strong his desire for healthy Christian growth in holy edification!

Paul counseled Titus to exercise care in his own personal conduct.

A bishop in a certain denomination was once reputedly rebuked for behavior ill-becoming to his office, whereupon he justifyingly explained, "I did that as a man and not as a bishop." Quickly there came this stinging retort: "If the devil gets the man, he will have the bishop also."

Titus must not become lax, and, while urging others to run well the race, be disapproved himself.

"In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works," Paul pleaded, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" This was by no means distrust. It was fatherly advice of the tenderest sort. It was the instruction of able and mature judgment. He knew that pride takes root in a most unsuspecting manner and grows with alarming rapidity to choke humility, to charm the flesh, to change the aim and to choose the subordinate. Privilege and popularity have played havoc with Christian testimony through the ages and countless numbers have so lessened their devotion that God has, in such cases, been treated as little more than a convenience. Titus must not be taken for granted. It was not likely he would fail in this respect, but the possibility is always a strong monster ready to capitalize on any relaxation of careful attention to the exemplary forms of Christlike decorum.

This timely advice, freighted with unaffected love, was received with sweet appreciation.

Paul besought Titus to impress honour upon slaves.

There is a hint in Paul's epistle to Titus about the cosmopolitan character of the average Christian assembly. There were aged and youthful, servants and slaves, civic authorities and civilians. Perhaps the servants were in the majority, for "the common folk heard Him gladly."

It was not more important for slaves to be instructed in the acceptable standards of Christian conduct, but theirs was a position highly provocative of discontent and ill temper. Their hours of labour were long and their tasks most exacting. Turning his attention to this particular class of individuals, the Apostle gave considerable emphasis as he charged Titus to "exhort servants [slaves] to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things"

The words which Paul used in this command should elicit special notice. The word "purloining" or "pilfering", means to render ineffective or inoperative. This shows the tremendous importance of proper behavior. An ill-considered word, an improper gesture, an unbecoming act could easily nullify the prestige of a life ministry. This is the destructiveness of satanic subtlety.

The word employed by the apostle for doing credit to or adorning the doctrine (k o s m e o) has a basic thought of polishing or making bright. Nothing can so make the life of Christ reflective in a believer as exemplary behavior. What one is speaks more loudly and with more convincing force than what one does or says.

The grace of God trains us to renounce ungodliness and to live temperate, upright and pious lives in this now-age. This gives to us the triangular concern in conduct; i.e. as to self, self-control; as to others, justness; as unto God, godliness. These practical precepts properly applied in their combined emphasis will produce manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit:

- Love, joy and peace toward God;

- Longsuffering, gentleness and goodness to others;

- Faith, meekness and temperance in regard to oneself.

Paul insisted that Titus curb social and political turbulence.

Paul was an ardent advocate of the obedience of believers to the powers that be. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,” he urged, “for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1).

There evidently was an early tendency, traces of which obtain today, for Christians to feel that being yoked to Christ presaged an utter disregard for civil regulations. Nothing could have more decisively defeated their purpose on Crete than the growth of such an ill-founded attitude.

The portents of such dangers must be dealt with vigorously and public declaration of the biblical position was necessary in order to reach the attention of all. “Remind your hearers that they must submit to the rulers who are in authority,” Paul wrote, and “to be ready to every good work [obey their laws].”

Realizing that he himself was once without the proper appreciation of godliness, he added, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.”

Then, the transforming and enlightening love of God entered, making Christians to be more responsible in their attitudes and actions. This was, statedly, the “washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Such a work of grace should have a high practical value in producing law-abiding citizens and more gracious associates in life’s various contacts.

Paul implored Titus to check theological speculations.

The archenemy of things high and holy is constantly attempting to vitiate matters vital to our calling. If by some artful artifice or subterfuge he can, for a moment, inveigle the Christian warrior to lower his guard, he is ready to register a strong, stunning blow.

Paul might have engaged the theological disputers in their incriminating retorts about the genealogy of our Lord, and he might have been open for debate regarding questions pertaining to the Law. With Titus, it was quite another matter, fraught with danger. He was less experienced and not too well informed. Besides, his appointment was to otherwise engage his attention. He was to

supply the things that were wanting in church organization which would pave the way for an all-around strengthening of the believers to face any eventuality-to give them assurance in spiritual verities regardless of any insurgent enemy attempt.

Therefore, the Apostle felt it a part of wisdom to advise Titus to “avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.” Such involvements are just as vain today. There is no spiritual nutriment in religious argument. It is far better to counsel the willing and confirm the saints.

Paul demanded that Titus discipline the heretical.

The more the Spirit stresses unity the fiercer Satan presses for disunity. Not all dissenters from the Truth dissociate from the assembly. It is to the enemy’s advantage to have saboteurs on the inside, striking at every opportunity to disturb the peace of the body. Let it forever be observed that “God is the author of peace and not of confusion;” and when disturbances develop, there is need for prayer, and possibly some invocation of stringent measures to free the local Church of the foreign element which foments strife. On this score, the beloved Apostle was firm in his conclusions. “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Titus 3:10-11). This was fair enough. Two warnings were to be given before more forceful means were applied, and this in the spirit of meekness as Paul wrote in Galatians 6:1.

Paul requested Titus to spend the winter with him.

Titus was to exercise the utmost diligence in fulfilling the instructions of the epistle for it was a matter of grave consequence that newborn babes in Christ on that island should have ample encouragement to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The work must engage his most prayerful interest and attention. He was dealing with God’s elect and haphazardness would be utterly unpardonable. However, Paul had a surprise for Titus. The letter carried an invitation from the veteran warrior of the faith to spend the winter with him at Nicopolis, and either Artemas or Tychicus would be sent in due time to relieve him of his duties at Crete.

It is not difficult to imagine with what keen delight the eyes of Titus looked upon these closing lines of a most weighty epistle. It was equally a strong incentive for him to “put his house in order” - to have his work well accomplished according to the will of God and the wish of Paul. The visit could not promise the ultimate of joy and blessing in Christian fellowship for either one if the report of Christian progress on the island of Crete were unfavorable.

This was a most delightful prospect for both. Indeed, it is difficult to determine which had the stronger expectation.

Paul carried an insatiable longing to hear about the blessing of God among the believers at Crete. His heart and soul were literally bound up in the welfare of his converts. He was crushed with disappointment because of the poor showing the Galatians made. Crete would surely give him cause for rejoicing. Titus would submit a graphic account of their progress.

And for Titus-well, it would be the richest joy of his life to live with the greatest personality the church ever produced. They both would revel in the company of each other. Fellowship is pleasurable communion between two or more individuals who stand on common ground, think similar thoughts and are interested in like matters of importance.

Since these prerequisites were unquestionably met, the city of Nicopolis had two most joyful visitors during the winter of 66 A.D., the last earthly coldness the beloved apostle experienced, for that year he gave his life gladly for the cause of Christ; and Titus carried sweet memories of that visit the rest of his days.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

01.11 Paul Promotes His Protege

CHAPTER ELEVEN PAUL PROMOTES HIS PROTEGE

“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God

which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Timothy 1:6)

Timothy, not too robust (1 Timothy 5:23), was easily disturbed emotionally, being sensitive to tears (2 Timothy 1:4). Imagine the deep impression made upon his youthful mind when Paul was publicly impugned and violently punished at Lystra. His knowledge of this experience is inferred by the Apostle when, later, he wrote, “Thou hast fully known. . . . (the) persecutions, afflictions which came to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.”

And what manner of man was it who would so dauntlessly return to the very scene of his maltreatment with neither protection nor promise of anything less cruel than his recent ignominious experience? What power inhered in such a personality to prompt an engagement in the very practice which had so incited the populace previously-that of preaching the sweetest message man ever heard? Timothy was stirred.

Tradition has it that, soon after their acquaintanceship, Paul sought to interest Timothy in service for the Lord. It is conjectured that they sat long into the night as the rugged veteran laid the challenge at the heart’s door of this affable but less robust newcomer to the faith. Being the candid realist he was, and in spite of (or should we believe because of) Timothy’s conceded character, Paul painted the life of a Christian servant in all the black strokes of its human dangers and in all the drabness of its deprivations.

Then, with forceful directness, he came to the point, “Timothy, will you enlist as a soldier of Jesus Christ?”

His voice had a distinct timbre of its own as he spoke in measured, unhurried phrases. His sincerity and proved dauntlessness denoted a powerful and integrated personality. This man of God was irresistible. His own life was a superb challenge to any one who knew how to detect the traits of a strong character.

Paul was rigid but not rabid, forceful but not frightful, cogent but not coarse, candid but not cantankerous. He dealt with men in a masculine manner.

He was cognizant of Timothy’s frailties. He was also sympathetic, but it is ever ill-advised to magnify human deficiencies with regard to Christian activity when God is able to supply our every need-even to the putting of His strength in our weakness. Robert Murray McCheyne and David Brainerd made themselves immortal in pressing on, by the grace of God, despite serious and incurable physical indispositions. Timothy was willing to trust God and that, in itself greatly impressed the Apostle. He would do all in his power to encourage him.

Paul deputized Timothy to stand guard at Ephesus.

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” This was the concerted cry of the milling multitudes in protest of Paul’s preaching which produced pandemonium in the streets of Ephesus. Confusion reigned as for hours the throngs vocally and violently affirmed their faith in the goddess which came down from Jupiter (Acts 19:34).

The town clerk had finally succeeded in quelling the irrational demonstration by explaining that no laws were violated by the visitors; and, if there should be some infraction, the civil authorities were well equipped to handle the case. It was thought best, however, that Paul, the main cause of their concern, move on to some other point. It is to that time he refers when later he wrote Timothy, saying, “I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus when I went into Macedonia” (1 Timothy 1:3).

There was a two-fold purpose in this move. Timothy was to denounce the infringement of false doctrine and to discountenance the infiltration of fables.

Strange views, like wild weeds, spring up quite readily, especially subsequent to a work of the Spirit. It is Satan’s counteraction through counterfeit. Paul was a wise general and well versed on enemy strategy. He exercised the utmost precaution to spare new converts from the traffic of truth-corrupting agents. This was an external defence, but there was also an internal danger.

Some young Christians with good intentions but poor judgment began introducing fables. This, of course, was not to be tolerated-no, not for a moment. When fiction flourishes fact fasts and folk falter and faint. Timothy must tactfully show them the folly and utter vanity of such a practice. Then, too, there were among the new believers at Ephesus those who had not been entirely “loosed from their grave clothes” and who delighted in protracted discussions of genealogies. Paul instructed his young fellowhelper to discourage this matter, for interminable pedigrees would lead to controversy, and controversy is the precursor or misunderstanding and ultimate dissension.

Paul propounded to Timothy the prospects of proper pedagogy.

The aims, ends, methods and processes of religious education are not devoid of, nor should they be divorced from, the common laws of logic. For years these people had joined in the praise of Diana of the Ephesians. They had been reared in an atmosphere diametrically opposite to their new found position in Christ. To consolidate their faith and strengthen their testimony required more than usual attention.

“Now the end of the commandment [the aim of your instruction],” the Apostle explained, “is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling [fruitless talk]; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm [insist upon]” (1 Timothy 1:5-7).

It would have been lamentable indeed for Timothy to have shown himself so incompetent, and, through some miscarriage of discretion, to have destroyed their confidence.

To obtain the desired results, his teaching was to be a ministry of love-a sympathetic and tender coaching of novices with an inoffensive patience until the light of the knowledge of Christ should flood their souls and fill them with a hungering for righteousness. The procedure might prove tedious, but new believers must be rooted and grounded if they are to wax strong in the Lord. “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

This was Paul's desire, and Timothy should be equipped to thus encourage them, knowing that his teaching must be supported by an exemplary life-a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Paul commanded Timothy to wage a winning warfare.

The Apostle was not one to make New Year's resolutions. His whole manner of life showed a constant resoluteness to be ever at his best for the Lord. It was his habitual bent and tenor to press on- always on the offensive. His desire could not be less impressive for one so dear to him as Timothy.

"This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck [ruin] . . ." (1 Timothy 1:18-20).

The admonitory note in this instruction seems to bear upon the hazard of inactivity and the danger of misdirected effort.

The surest way to avoid shipwreck of one's faith is to exercise that faith with constancy. Those who hide their light under a bushel will sooner or later find a feeble and flickering light. It cannot, under such circumstances, through disuse, have a brilliance and a glow that would impress others who are in sin and darkness.

Neither does a weakened faith afford much comfort in life's varying vicissitudes or offer much security when a treacherous foe wages an attack. Paul was a staunch advocate of preparedness with a readiness to strike if and when the enemy threatened. He reminded Timothy that he had joined others in predicting, from the very start, that he would be a credit to the cause of Christ, but he must wage a vigorous warfare to avoid violating such confidence as was reposed in him. Others had missed the mark, having swerved from the faith.

Paul called on Timothy to be strong.

Physical deficiencies do not imply spiritual weakness. On the contrary, these may enhance one's strength by driving one to a firmer dependence upon the Lord.

The contention is not without foundation that the Apostle's "thorn in the flesh" was a boon to his finer spiritual traits. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me", was his submissive declaration, (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This was his confident conclusion as he bore an irksome handicap. He knew well that Satan might seek the advantage by magnifying Timothy's impaired health. As a father, he intreated him, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1).

The grace that is in Christ Jesus-was not that the divine answer to his own difficulty? Verily it was. Grace is implanted power, a strengthening potency to make one strong in the inner man, regardless of human frailties. "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." We are to remember that He is divine and that all things can be done through Christ which strengtheneth us.

Repeatedly the Apostle had advised his son in the faith concerning factors which would make an eminent contribution to his spiritual fitness. “Timothy,” he appealed, “keep that which is committed to thy trust . . . flee youthful lusts . . . follow after righteousness.”

Not every young man is privileged to have such an able and faithful counsellor, but how timely is the word to “exhort one another daily while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). A Christian leader, especially in those early days, must be able to withstand the many rebuffs and unfairnesses which inevitably come, for the enemy is active. “Yea and all who will live godly must suffer persecution.”

Paul warned Timothy not to shrink morbidly from consequences of the ministry.

Down through the corridors of time has echoed Paul’s immortal avowal, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” It has become the shibboleth of all the succeeding faithfuls, for however fit and ready one may be to testify to the power of the gospel, such an one is disqualified utterly who is ashamed. It is more than the trait of cowardice; it is the white flag of surrender to the opposing force, hoisted by fear.

Fear came with Satan’s first stroke against mankind and left Adam and Eve cowering at the approach of the Creator in the cool of the day. Fear paralyzes energy and is a master stratagem used by the devil with frequency and effectiveness.

Paul was not one to overlook important matters and Timothy must have some instruction along this line incorporated in his training. “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord,” he emphasized, “nor of me His prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8).

The Apostle was a commando-type of Christian soldier. He was never deterred by the portents of danger or by the strength of enemy defenses. He had confidence in his weapons which were not carnal but mighty under God to the dismantling of strongholds. He would have been a sad and disappointed trainer if his protégé failed to emulate his daring for the sake of Christ.

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear,” he assuredly affirmed, “but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

The consequences may mean imprisonment or harsh affliction, but a good soldier endures hardness. There should be no relaxation anywhere along the line, for the gospel must be delivered to the whole world.

Paul advised Timothy to major in sound words.

The message of the Christian has neither equal nor rival. The Word of God is quick and powerful, deep and pure, spirit and life. It brings to man the message of heaven, revealing the mysteries of the Father. It is productive of the most transforming results and will accomplish ends undreamed. But it must never be adulterated or deceitfully handled.

This, too, Timothy had to learn, and the Apostle made certain that his disciple’s curriculum embraced this imperative principle. “Hold fast the form of sound words . . . that good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.”

There it was! A plea to guard the trust of truth. The word “form” is listed in the margin as “pattern”, and the word “sound” is a descriptive connotation stressing virility, healthfulness and the life-giving qualities of God’s Word.

This principle has been neglected, and with its neglect has come an influx of unsoundness which falls short of building Christians after the proper pattern. It is not difficult to imagine the deep distress which would seize the Apostle were he to hear the vanities of present-day departures.

The trust of truth, Paul avers, can only be kept by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth within us.

He had explained previously that spiritual understanding is not through sensual faculties. “But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit,” he wrote, “for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

One reason why the Holy Spirit deigns to dwell in us is that He might take objective truth and make it an inward reality. He will give a strong grasp of the Scripture to those who yield their lives to Him and definitely prefer divine truth always to the exclusion of error.

If care and interest, prayer and concern could combine in an able advisor to bring results, then Timothy was destined to be an unwavering advocate of Christian doctrine and practice.

Paul charged Timothy to he constantly and consistently orthodox.

It is clear that the Apostle sought to impress upon his pupil the immutability of the divine economy. The gospel was not to be in vogue at one time and outmoded at another. It does not change with the notions and fashions of men. It does not change at all-it knows no fluctuations, innovations or alterations.

Satan desires to see the gospel change; for then, it would not bear the character of its Author Who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Paul envisaged a time when Satan’s desire would become prominently reflected in men, a day in which they would overwhelm themselves with teachers to suit their whims and tickle their fancies, turning from the truth and wandering off after fictions.

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ Who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom,” said the Apostle most solemnly, “preach the Word; be instant in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

This was, in a sense, a summation of his counsel-the outflow of wisdom from one whose close contact with God and his direct revelation from the Lord made him an exclusive authority.

He insisted that Timothy think straight and that he should act accordingly, all thought and every action being governed by the Holy Spirit in the light of the revealed Word. This consistency of position was to be complemented by a constancy of procedure which indeed it would produce. Thirst knows no season, and hunger as well is an abiding companion of man. Just so, there is daily, throughout every year, a call for the Water of Life and the Manna of Heaven. “Never relax your efforts while men are dying without Christ,” seems to be the burden of this challenge, and who knew better than Timothy how fully Paul’s own life gave force to his plea.

Paul summoned Timothy to his side before his martyrdom.

There are times when none but one's closest friends are desired -times when just a lone individual may be singled out of a host of acquaintances to satisfy an inward longing which wells up indefinably from deep within. A statement may not be exchanged, not even a word uttered, but sincere affection has a language all its own.

The atmosphere is changed by the presence of a friend. The handclasp communicates a warmth and the fingers upon a heated brow transmit a sympathy which words are too inadequate to express. The light of a countenance and the penetrating appeal of the eyes can impute more moral stamina to a weak soul than endless applications of earth's soothing balms.

"There's nothing else upon this earth With all its money, all its mirth, Worth half as much as friends are worth." The termination of a race well run was imminent. The shades would soon fall on earth's little day for this magnanimous character of Christian fame. Soon he would fight his last battle.

Then-and he had longed for the day-he would be absent from the body and present with his blessed Lord which he affirmed would be far, far better.

There was no misgiving, no shrinking, no fear. He had achieved widespread reputation, yet he rated himself less than the least of the apostles. What he did, what he suffered was all for Him Whose he was and Whom he served. Had he ten thousand lives, they would all be placed unreservedly on the altar of service. He only had one life, and part of that was consumed by animosity for Christ; but from the moment he saw the Saviour, he was lost irretrievably in His love, lived by His faith, was sustained by His grace and was now ready to seal that love with his own life.

One day, the enemy only halfway succeeded in ending his earthly ministry. There was among the witnesses at that time a young man whose heart was deeply moved, and who, perhaps through that very incident, became receptive to the gospel. Now, the end was sure and wicked hands would succeed in destroying the body. If he had but one request to make before the approaching end came, what would it be? We need not conjecture. He mentions it twice in the last few lines of his writings.

"Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me," he wrote.

That was all. No need for elaboration. Those few words spoke volumes. He wanted his son, Timothy. Timothy's heart could dictate but one answer. He must favour the man who found him and imparted to his own life the rich fragrance of his deep experience in love and fatherly tenderness. The curtain falls and we are not given to know whether Timothy arrived in time to bid the departing Apostle farewell, but it is safe to assume that every effort was made to that end.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

01.12 Paul's Perilous Euroclydon

CHAPTER TWELVE PAUL'S PERILOUS EUROCLYDON

"The south wind blew softly . . . But not long after there arose

a tempestuous wind called Euroclydon" (Acts 27:13-14)

Paul was, in many respects, a law unto himself. On more than one occasion the legalists were sent into a huddle to determine the best disposition of his case. Not infrequently, after serious consultation, decisions had to be reversed when the great Apostle before the bar of justice would frustrate them by using another language, claiming dual-citizenship or citing some obsolescent law. King Agrippa had such an experience. He called Festus, the governor of Judea, into counsel; and, after weighing the evidence, they reached the conclusion that "this man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Caesar." Now, he must be sent to Rome.

The sailing date was not arbitrarily fixed. It was a matter of booking passage whenever a ship sailed toward Italy. In due course Paul was placed on board a small vessel with two hundred, seventy-five other passengers, mostly prisoners of the state. That was to become a most eventful voyage. The whole Mediterranean was convulsed with incredible turbulence. The fathomless deep writhed with increasing restlessness. The wind with unabated violence plowed deep furrows in the watery field, heaping mountainous waves in an unstable poise, only to lash one against another in spasms of fury. Sun and stars alike were eclipsed in the raging storm as the fierce gale spent its force.

In the midst of the tempest, tossed and torn, was their little craft in dire distress. It put to sea under balmy skies, with the south wind blowing but softly and with its confident crew hopeful of reaching a winter haven at Phenice. The progress was gratifying until-until the foe of all mariners began displaying the portents of disaster. With immeasurable volume and incalculable velocity, it rushed over the horizon with insidious and inscrutable maneuvers like a powerful military thrust against a helpless garrison in an open field.

Scripturally stated, "the ship was caught" (caught by furious forces. Its control was utterly wrested from the hands of naval experience and driven off its course and under the lee of a little island called Clauda. Desperately, the terrified sailors struggled to cast anchor and to lighten the cargo lest they plunge onto the Syrtis (quicksands).

Their lives were in constant jeopardy as the gale harassed them with undiminished violence through three sunless days and starless nights. When the last ray of hope was vanishing, Paul signaled for attention. His calm demeanor contrasted with the fearful, fainting hearts of the crew. Above the roar of raging waters, his voice was heard in an immortal declaration: "Sirs, take courage for I believe God."

The tempest was without precedent. For a full fortnight it raged, with each succeeding day lowering the morale of the sailors and depleting the resourcefulness of the official personnel. But,

then, life would not be so adventuresome nor faith so necessary if trials did not present some new problem. The undiminishing wind velocity, the twisting, swirling waves, the quicksands, the rocks-all these baffling factors were calling for the wisest nautical maneuvers, but human ingenuity was obviously insufficient. The dense darkness, settling for many successive nights and days, had a marked demoralizing effect upon those on board and provoked many irrational acts. All hope of survival had disappeared. It was, in truth, a definite time of man's extremity. Eternity alone will reveal the value of a praying saint who brought triumph in the tempest.

Paul Volunteers Counsel.

Three times the Apostle called for an audience. Each time he prefaced his statement with the salutation "Sirs." This was not sheer courtesy. It was directness and definiteness more than it was politeness. "Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage" (Acts 27:10). This was perception. It was late in the sailing season, about the middle of October, beyond the time of the Feast of Trumpets, and much concern was evidenced about the advisability of continuing the voyage. The ship dropped anchor for a time of consultation at a place called the Fair Havens. It was here that Paul enunciated his concern. The warning, however, was ignored as the commanding officer ordered the journey resumed.

Carried, as he was, by force of circumstance, into the dangers that lay before, Paul had but one recourse. That was a precious and an assuring one. He knew well that his life had been hidden in God by Christ Jesus from the indescribable tempest of sin and its consequences. What was any storm in comparison? Perhaps Peter had related to him during their fortnight visit in Jerusalem, some four years previously, how Jesus bade him to walk on the water in the midst of the storm. Surely Paul was cognizant of the intervention of the Master when once He stilled the waves and quieted the disciples' hearts (Mark 4:39). Thus, there was a peace-sustaining calmness in his soul. All was well between him and the Lord. He would not fear the storm nor faint before its terrifying portents.

Of all the faith-impairing stratagems which Satan employs, perhaps none is so destructive as to be held where personal wishes are ignored, scruples belittled and finer principles mocked. It is then that faith must have a strength to remain firm. To reason that the force of circumstances may preclude all possibility of an unswerving steadfastness is false logic. The testimony of the martyrs refutes it. Faith has an enduring quality which, when firmly exercised, sues for victory even when hope has faded utterly. He who counseled others to "withstand in the evil day and having done all, to stand," is, himself, a towering example of such teaching. He was the one and only passenger on that voyage who had unquestionable composure. His faith was unimpaired.

Paul was a veteran of many a trial. He could even look a storm in the face and declare, "None of these things move me." This was steadfastness, the kind about which David sang in Psalm eleven. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Israel's sweet singer inquired. To him it seemed that the foundations of law and justice, of love and loyalty, of virtue and honour, of courtesy and decency had utterly collapsed. He was urged to "flee as a bird" which meant he could run as a renegade to evil, depart as a weakling to worldliness or turn as a traitor to compromise. Would he do this? No, not if God is Who He is and where He is. not if a servant can still repose confidence in the Almighty. David avowed with firmness, "In the Lord put I my trust." Paul was of the same mind. He rested on a foundation which no man could lay and all hell could not destroy (1

Corinthians 3:11). The passengers were sanctified by his presence.

Paul ventures an exhortation.

“Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me and not have loosed from Crete . . . now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship” (Acts 27:21-22).

This exhortation came at a time when the sun had been eclipsed for many days and the stars obscured for as many nights, at a time when hopelessness had been conceded by all. Even then, it was only after lengthy fasting, which is suggested by the words “after long abstinence” (Acts 27:21).

This time was spent in prevailing prayer. His petitioning voice may not have been audible above the roaring waves, but it is safe to assume that he was storming heaven’s door, not for his personal safety but for the passengers’ salvation. Whether his own decease were by submerging or by impalement was of little consequence. One way or the other, he would be with his blessed Lord. His chief concern was for the lost which often reached the proportions of heart-travail and soul-agony. We can almost visualize him in the hold importuning God when not on the deck imploring men. Paul had a faith which left little or no room for fear.

In the darkest hour, the most likely time for a heavenly visitant, the Angel of God stood by him.

This is the dramatic manner in which divine reinforcements were rushed to a staunch, stalwart soldier of the cross who was waging a battle against great odds. It was the One whom Paul served, the One to whom he belonged; it was the Lord Himself. He stands by His own. Under no circumstance will He leave them in the lurch.

“Truth forever on the scaffold,

Wrong forever on the throne;

Yet the scaffold sways the future,

But behind the dim unknown

Standeth God within the shadows,

Keeping watch above His own.”

Let the tempest tear at the stern, the arm of the Lord was beneath the bow as long as His servant was part of the cargo.

The ship could not and would not disintegrate until a “chosen vessel” had disembarked. With such substantial encouragement, a prisoner could well preach to the perplexed people on board. He exhorted them first of all to be of good cheer, to let their fears subside; for, while the ship would inevitably founder, the passengers would unquestionably reach land. Paul’s fearlessness in the midst of such appalling conditions was supported by his self-abandonment to the care of an able Deliverer, and this fact made him the indomitable personality of which the Church could well wish for many.

The message of the Lord to His servant was of a threefold character.

First, it had to do with much needed comfort. “Fear not, Paul.” We must not forget that Paul was a human being. His old nature was not eradicated. Satan still had sufficient in him to gain a beachhead. Paul well knew this fact, for did not he once say, “He that thinketh he standeth, let him take heed lest he fall?” This protracted storm could well have worn down so rugged an individual as he, even as the constant lashing threatened to crush the vessel. But the supply lines are never too difficult for the Captain of the Lord’s hosts. He simply dispatched His angel, who with lightning speed was there with what His servant required most. It was divine assurance; it was heavenly comfort. It was a tonic par excellence to the tired and troubled disciples when their Lord greeted them with a “Fear not.” It was a stimulant, too, to Isaiah of old, when weary and worn, to have the Lord God say, “It is I, even I, that comforteth thee.”

The message of God to Paul was also something of a confirmed commission.

“Thou must be brought before Caesar.” The word must carries with it the very essence of compulsion. Our Lord had the lash above His head. “He must needs go through Samaria.” Every human being who knows anything about responsibility is conscious of the lash of musts in his life. This is particularly true of servants. Here, it became evident that the Lord meant for Paul to go to Rome. It must have been by permission and prompting of the Holy Spirit that he first appealed his case to Caesar.

It was by divine protection that the journey was completed during such unprecedented conditions. It was by divine power, released through a commissioned ambassador, that Roman Jews were to receive the gospel. So to Rome he came.

Further, this heavenly announcement contained a promise of conversions.

“Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.”

In what sense were they given to Paul? It can hardly be doubted that there was a work of grace on the ship. Those men knew that all secular supports were removed and that they must fall back either upon God or upon nothing. How fortunate for them that there was on board one who knew of a surety that God is a very present help in trouble! How wonderful that the divine commission put the right man in the right place at the right time, a man who had come face to face with the Saviour and who knew how to introduce others to Him! These are the doings of the Lord and they are wonderful in our eyes. They gave up the ship but they gained the Saviour.

Paul voices his faith.

It is not difficult to imagine something of the language of desperation from unregenerate hearts during those tumultuous days of sustained suspense. The restless prisoners with the usual bitter attitude toward the state for their apprehension, and the disgust because of their own stupidity in failing to evade the law, the resentfulness of ship hands at the harsh statements of superiors because of incompetence due to demoralizing fears, the unsuppressed oaths of officers at the slightest provocation, all gave the atmosphere a sacrilegious cast. It was at such a time as this that Paul dared to reaffirm his faith in God and to make vocal the only hope of all men. Although his speech was said to be contemptible by some hypercritical Corinthians, it must have rung out with triumphant clarity to sober the minds of the unhappy and unstable voyagers-“Sirs, I believe God.”

This personal profession of faith was magnified by a prospect which inspired Paul noticeably. “It shall be!” he insisted. All that the passengers could see were the terrors of the deep, the horrors of death and the blackness of the future.

There is no prospect whatever for one whose eyes are unenlightened by the Word, whose heart is unaffected by divine grace and whose feet are unled by the Holy Spirit. With Paul it was different. “It shall be!” he urged. He meant that all would be well. He insisted that all would reach shore in safety.

All of this assurance was based on promise-the promise of the Angel of God. “It shall be even as it was told me,” he added. Let us never think otherwise. What God has promised will never fail of fulfillment.

- It shall transpire even as He said. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.”

- It shall be even as it was told. “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

- It shall be even as it was told. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”

- It shall be even as it is told. “And the nations snail be turned into hell together with them that forget God.”

- It shall be even as it was told.

Not a man on board that Rome-bound ship doubted for a moment the intense seriousness of the Apostle; all felt the impact of his convincing statement.

Well did Paul know that he was a marked man. The circumstances which made the other living beings prisoners of the state varied in seriousness of legal infractions, but all knew about Paul-the deserter of his Jewish faith, a self-established religious leader, a noted fanatic, a perverter of sacred matters. Yet, one who exercised himself “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men” could not be forced into despondency under any trying experience.

What was more, in relating the heavenly announcement, he proudly identified himself as a child of God and a servant of the Most High, by adding, “Whose I am and whom I serve.” Men on an isolated raft, entombed in a blasted mine or on a sinking ship usually become responsive to the Word of God. Paul’s exhortation had registered.

During those fearful fourteen days of breath-taking naval experiences, the men on board mustered what religious fervor they could and instituted a fast. Paul, remembering the message of the Angel that the ship should be lost, knew something of the struggle each would have for his life. Such an effort would demand the utmost strength, and strength is gained by nourishment; thus, he besought them to take meat, explaining that “this is for your health.” Joining them in a meal amid the tempest, “he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all.” He was neither ashamed of the gospel of Christ nor of the Christ of the gospel.

Life is in truth mare nostrum. The skies are no longer balmy; the clouds are thickly gathering. The sailing is difficult for the hour is dark, and the wind of confusion and perplexity is increasing in velocity. The voices of the storm are loud and distress calls fill the atmosphere, already surcharged with apprehension, fear and anxiety. Many little crafts are thrust upon the shoals, while untold numbers are carried by contrary winds, with sails torn, rudders gone, and disaster looming with terrifying prominence. All the while the lighthouse signals are more and more misleading with the lower lights faint and flickering. This is a nautical view of life.

Alas! Jonah was asleep in his storm; Paul was alert. What should be our condition? If in Paul's Euroclydon the fellow sailors needed courage, not human but divine, of what stupendous proportions is the need in this present Levanter of ours with its world-wide threatening?

Shall we hesitate to stand amid the turmoil of atheism and spiritual cowardice and affirm with undiminishing emphasis, "Sirs, we believe God?"

Paul saw the futility of human effort without divine assistance. Equally true is this same fact today. Every servant of the Lord should make vocal his faith in the God who is sufficient, in any storm, for those who repose their trust in Him, "Sirs, we believe God!" We see the "works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep; for He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind which lifteth up the waves thereof."

Any end that brings one to the Lord is a good end, and a cry of despair is a concomitant to dependence. Blessed is the man, even amid the convulsions of the deep, who knows there is a Light that never flickers, a Lifeline that never weakens, a distress Receiver Who never slumbers or sleeps. "Sirs, we believe God!"

Every sailor has a desired haven. He has glad hopes and happy expectations, but his anticipation may suffer through the treachery of the storm. Dangers lurk along his course. "Today we're happy and in the sunlight's glow; tomorrow we may be limpin' and trudgin' through the snow." But, we believe God!

"He maketh the storm a calm so that the waves thereof are still . . . Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men!"

Yes, Paul sailed head-on into an Euroclydon, and every one of us, sometime, somewhere, may be tossed about in a fearful Levanter. Hope will seem to fade, joy will vanish, the soul will melt, indecision will tower insurmountably; but, away with fear-be stilled thou failing heart! Believe thou in God, and triumph amid the tempest.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

01.13 Paul Decries Satanic Chicanery

CHAPTER THIRTEEN PAUL DECRIES SATANIC CHICANERY “Ye were running well; who did hinder you? . . .” (Galatians 5:7) The mental antics of men have reached a new peak in their treatment of religious matters. No one knows how many forces are militating against the spiritual welfare of man. They are as subtle as the sound of a cricket and as elusive as an hart on a woodland terrace. They can strike with the sting of an adder and envelop with the grace of an octopus. They are not detectable through a microscope, nor subdued by a common antidote.

No one lives long without an awareness of unfair artifices continually operating to pry loose whatever grip one may have upon matters of eternal promise. Numberless cases of waywardness and failure, sometimes of infinite pain and sorrow, exist because an issue was confused and the regrettable choice made. Then, when disillusionment leaves in its wake a life with an empty present and a dismal future, the question marks do little more than straighten into exclamations of pathos and pity. How incontrovertibly wise is the counsel of our wonderful Lord: “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.”

Satan, the arch-enemy of the soul, is a treacherous trickster. He would block the course that leads to the sinner’s salvation and would blast his hopes for eternity. He seeks also to blind the eyes of the believer, to baffle his mind and to blight his testimony. He is a chicaner of the first magnitude. His deceptive and destructive ability is being woefully minimized if not willingly ignored. His appearance is as an angel of light. His appeal is multiform and his field of strategy exceedingly extensive. Man’s weakness is his main avenue of approach and he will dog man’s path while his emissaries dig the pitfalls. No accusation against him could possibly be libelous, for the Scriptures tell us that “he was a murderer from the beginning and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). He rides forth with pride and boastfulness; and as he sticks in the spurs, he gallops men into the gutter, women into prostitution, young folk into vices, nations into wars and governments into ruin, leaving indescribable destruction and sorrow in his path. He is presumptuous (Job 1:6), proud (1 Timothy 3:6) and powerful (Ephesians 2:2). He would pervert the Scriptures (Matthew 4:6), oppose God’s work (1 Thessalonians 2:18) and hinder the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Chicanery is the employment of shifts, subterfuges and artifices to draw attention away from the merits of a case or question. This is precisely what happened to the believers at Galatia. Who can say we are stronger than they? “He that thinketh he standeth, let him take heed lest he fall.” Paul expressed deep alarm by saying, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Galatians 1:6). This amazement is not sheer surprise. It is a disillusionment of heart-rending proportions. Like an athletic coach dealing with a faltering team, he inquires, “Ye were running well, who did hinder you?” Their course has been completed. Ours is yet in progress. Let the same voice spur us on as it urges, “So run as to win.”

Satanic chicanery is manifested in a multiplicity of manners, diversified as well as diabolical. It may be perpetrated in an innocent-appearing form such as the mirth of a Santa instead of the birth of the Saviour, a rabbit instead of the resurrection, reformation instead of transformation, deviation instead of dedication, duty instead of devotion, levity instead of loyalty or goodness instead of grace. These are undeniably and irrefutably his policies and his practices. He has become a pastmaster in the art of destroying reverence and discrediting worship.

The latest unabridged Webster dictionary says concerning chicanery, “a mean or unfair artifice to obscure the truth and to perplex a cause.” Hardly more than a casual perusal of the Galatian epistle is necessary to learn that this was decidedly the destructive stratagem Satan used among the believers there.

The truth was obscured by false representations.

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?” the Apostle sadly inquired.

A certain man by the name of Simon had bewitched the people of Samaria in some pedantic manner (Acts 8:9) but the Galatians were differently approached. The word which is used in the Apostle’s question (bas-kah-ee-no) means to fascinate by false representations. Now, can the reader begin to appreciate why Paul said he was amazed at the turn of affairs among them?

He could not conceive of any truly born-again person becoming so fascinated with a substitute that the glories of Christ should be eclipsed. Yet this is what had happened. That is why he termed them “foolish” or “senseless.” Their better judgment had been rendered inoperative. The one aspect of the situation which so deeply grieved Paul was the fact that they found joy in that which was false, even as the children of Israel found enjoyment joining with the heathen in dancing around the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain in the presence of the thrice-holy God.

It was because of a similar condition some six-hundred years before Christ that the Lord had a controversy with His covenant people.

Through Jeremiah, He said, “An amazing and an horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so” (Jeremiah 5:30-31).

Those who love, or are fascinated with, the false way naturally desire false teachers to favor them with such encouragement. Paul had met them before. He was well acquainted with these diabolical inclinations, for, said he, “After their own lusts shall they heap unto themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Yet, he was noticeably moved when such a blight had befallen the Galatian believers. It was a stunning blow to him, and he made no attempt to conceal his emotion. He had preached the true gospel to them and had seen the evident change which had come into their lives, but alas! the enemy began quickly to corrupt their minds. They were new converts-merely babes in Christ, and succumbed quite readily to the fascinating misrepresentations visited upon them by cunning devices of false agents.

It was in no vulgar sense that the Apostle referred to them as foolish.

It was an emphasized way of letting them know that they had acted unwisely. His main complaint, and a justified one, was that they had not obeyed the truth. When truth is not obeyed, it is comparatively easy for Satan to bring about an obscuration of fact.

Gullibility is caused by defenselessness, and defenselessness results when people are not bulwarked by the Word of God. “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). But, even though the Galatian believers were young Christians, they, nevertheless, had heard the gospel and believed. They professed to love Christ. Then, how could they become fascinated with a substitute?

It was almost too hard for Paul to bear. He could endure hardness, he could withstand an enemy, he could meet innumerable crises, but it nearly broke his heart when professing Christians waxed cold in their devotion to Christ or turned from His will. Their immaturity, regardless of the cause, depressed him. “My little children,” he wrote, “I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you . . . for I stand in doubt of you” (Galatians 4:19-20). Paul was not one to sit by in silence while the enemy attempted to confiscate the flock. He was constrained to rush to their rescue. He knew, even when he asked, who was hindering them. It was the one who not only hinders, but hates and hurts the people of God. He had to be dealt with.

“For still our ancient foe,

Doth seek to work his woe;

His craft and power are great,

And armed with cruel hate,

On earth is not his equal.

The Prince of Darkness grim-

We tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure,

For, lo, his doom is sure

One little word shall fell him.” The truth was obscured through feigned authorization.

Paul may not have known the names or the addresses of those who visited the Church at Galatia with such blatant false doctrines. Had he been there, he would not have tolerated their presence, but the Galatian believers were not sufficiently established to detect the error of the presentations, all the while imbibing the unorthodoxy issuing from these pseudo-prophets.

It is possible that the intruders had convincing credentials and were pleasant enough in their manners and methods, but even Satan comes as an angel of light. Personal niceties are not a concomitant to genuineness or good platform performance the criterion for orthodoxy. The Apostle had evidently received a glowing account of the visitors-how lovely, how convivial, how able. With him, it was not so much the persons present as the propositions presented. His reply brought a stinging denunciation. “Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel . . . let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

The truth was obscured by ulterior motives.

It is the devil's plan to counterattack wherever the gospel is advanced in a spiritual offensive. He would not only offset but obliterate, if possible, the work accomplished by the Spirit. Paul had no scruples against terming these Judaizing doctors a group of troublemakers, and no hesitance in charging them with a cool, calculating intent to "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7).

This was the discerning mind of one who had walked and talked with God for more than two decades. His firmness but illustrated his great love for the gospel and his deep interest in the spiritual welfare of Christians. He did not court the favour of any man. He spoke when necessity arose and as the situation demanded and always without partiality. He contended, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). The Galatian matter was a cause for real concern and it had to be dealt with.

The cause was perplexed by some contravening power.

The tense tells the tale. They were running well, but the present demonstration was anything but commendable. How general this ignoble condition is among God's people can only be accurately known by Him Who looks down from heaven upon the children of men, but a careful observation would indicate a great company who got off to a good start and then lost their sense of direction and wandered widely afield. The Ephesians left their first love (Revelation 2:4), and Demas turned toward the allurements of this present age (2 Timothy 4:10).

There has ever been a way that "seemeth right to man," and, without the mind of Christ and the leading of the Spirit, that is the course he is sure to take. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," saith the Lord (Isaiah 55:8). We must recognize the incompatibility between God's thoughts and ours and the definite distinction between His ways and any other way that might be suggested. By Scriptural imagery, this world is a wilderness, but God has well outlined the way that leads home, and the Bible is our infallible map. Hence, no one should become perplexed or diverted into diabolical detours.

That the Galatians were sadly perplexed was readily discernible by the Apostle. That is why he enquired, "Who hath hindered you?"

The laws of God are inexorable. They call for growth, advancement and progress. Any attempted reversal is neither for man's good nor for God's glory, yet they had turned back to the weak and beggarly elements, placing themselves again under the bondage of the law.

The subtlety of their false advisers is detected in that they seemingly did not disparage the blessings of Christianity nor criticize their acceptance; but, sentimentally, they argued that a religion so old and so tried as Judaism should not be utterly discarded for some new revelation. This, quite naturally, elicited a favorable response, with the result that they tried to appropriate the new, while still retaining the old.

They would gather in the name of Christ but would observe special days and months and times and years (Galatians 4:10). This was most grievous to Paul who explained, "If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor" (Galatians 2:18). The inference was very clear. Appealing to what spiritual discernment they may have had, he pointedly asked, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

While it is good strategy for the enemy to cut the supply lines and to intercept the messages from headquarters, we must not minimize the sadness of that situation where Satan has so perverted the gospel that people are doomed but contented, and where believers are saved but most barren and unfruitful.

The same contravening power is operating effectively today, and the cause is so perplexed that isms and cults are springing up like weeds; and, true to the prediction of our Lord in His message to the disciples on the Mount of Olives, the time has come when many are being deceived. The real issue is lost because satanic propaganda is drawing the attention of the masses from the true meaning and transcendent importance of the finished work of Christ on Calvary.

The cause was perplexed by ill-persuasion.

The reason they were running well was because they were correctly started, and the reason they deviated was because they later were ill-advised. The course of their action proved the source of their advice. “This persuasion cometh not of Him that calleth you,” the Apostle pointed out, adding “I do not frustrate (atheteo-“lay aside”) the grace of God; for, if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

The word the Apostle used was expressive of their attitude; they had laid aside the grace of God by not obeying the Truth. Paul estimated the seriousness of the whole affair, the entrance of false teachers and the hearing they were granted, as being tantamount to a re-crucifixion of Christ (3:1). Weigh carefully his words to them on this indictment,

“O foolish Galatians . . . before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you” (Galatians 3:1).

The many interrogations and emotional outbursts in the epistle reveal something of the depth of the sorrow which filled his heart when the incredible news reached him about the departure among the Galatian believers. Whether they would receive his correction and amend their ways, was a matter that he had to leave where faith rests every problem, but he sought hard to register the fact that their present procedure was not in keeping with their new calling and was irrefutably not of God.

Paul usually found, when in a difficult position, that a word of personal testimony was most helpful. Thus, he related to them how he:

- Walked by revelation (Galatians 2:2),

- Lived by faith (Galatians 2:20),

- Served with steadfastness (Galatians 2:5)

- Fellowshipped through grace (Galatians 2:9).

He explained that they were not the only ones who had to contend with the enemy forces, and the trait of a good soldier is never to give ground. This requires strength, the kind of strength which is derived from God’s Word; but the Galatians closed their eyes to the Truth, were fascinated with false representations, became utterly confused and lost their testimony. The Apostle told them frankly and without equivocation that he was afraid of them, afraid of what deplorable effect their

inconsistencies would have upon others who needed Christ and might be won for Him.

The cause is being perplexed by cunning substitutions.

There are three familiar appellatives used to set forth the relationship of believers to the Lord; namely, the temple, the body and the bride. They speak respectively of worship, service and fellowship, or communion, commission and companionship. The strategy of Satan is to corrupt the worship, disrupt the service and interrupt the fellowship, thereby robbing the Sovereign, the sinner and the saint.

God not only desires worship but commands it. “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God.” It is also stated that the Father seeketh such (John 4:23). This indicates both longing and lack, for that which is found in abundance is not sought after. God is not only a jealous God but a thrice-holy God and He has ever attached the greatest importance to His worship.

There is perhaps no other phase of the sacred sphere where Satan has made such devastating attacks. His demoniacal chicanery calls for a missing of the mark and it matters not to him which way the pendulum swings. To whatever extreme the people may be the more susceptible, to that end he directs their attention.

On the one hand, he presents hyper-ritualistic procedure with its emptiness; on the other hand, he encourages unguided informality with its appalling irreverence and its distasteful secular character.

The ritualist looks with disdain upon the informalist who, in turn, decries the ritualist. All the while both may have missed the mark according to the true standard of acceptable worship.

It would seem that the scriptural requirements call for enough dignity to make for reverence and sacredness, but enough informality to allow the Holy Spirit liberty in His operations. How can one work without worshipping? How can one benefit by worshipping unacceptably? To those in Malachi’s day who followed their own inclinations in worship, the Lord said, “I have no pleasure in you, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Galatians 1:10).

Satan tries to disrupt the body by breaking the unity. His distractions and disturbances are occasioned by jealousy, misunderstanding, unkindness and personal ambition. If there is mutiny in the camp, no offensive can be waged. Prayer is thwarted, power diminished and witnessing limited. Then, the unsaved are justified in saying, “No man cared for my soul” (Psalms 142:4).

Where is the assembly of believers that has not felt the blow? Satanic treachery follows no rules and adheres to no laws. The body is for expression, but the Lord cannot express Himself when there is disruption. “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Disputation and division are twin evils and can only be avoided by the most careful and prayerful attention to basic matters-by obedience to the Word of God. There cannot be a united effort where there is a divided front and the forces of evil are continually operating to develop just such a precluding factor. Cumbersome organization and involved activity in a local church may have an imposing appearance to the outsider and a gratifying effect upon the one within and yet make not a solitary contribution to the cause of Christ. Unless the believer exercises the utmost vigilance, his fruit will be but leaves, dried and worthless at the coming of our Lord.

With the keen appreciation which Paul possessed, being filled with the Spirit, walking in closeness to His Lord and enjoying the triumphs of His grace, he could not refrain from decrying the deceptive devices which were so adversely affecting the well-being of the Galatian Christians.

His voice needs to be heard today, denouncing the subtle inroads of Satan so subtly visited upon the poorly informed and unsuspecting people who, in their sad complacency, are totally unaware of the irreparable loss they are sustaining. We ourselves may have known better and more fruitful days, but have been hindered.

“Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

~ end of chapter 13 ~

01.14 Paul Found Fellowship

CHAPTER FOURTEEN PAUL FOUND FELLOWSHIP

“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles . . .

and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:27-28) In recounting some of his experiences at a later date, Paul spoke about being in perils of his own countrymen. The first such experience, which was a serious one, took place at Damascus soon after his conversion. He had outwitted the Jews there in a discussion about his Lord, “proving that this is very Christ.”

To overcome their chagrin and to give vent to their inherent antichristian bitterness, they produced some legal technicality whereby they could demand his life. Machinery was quickly thrown into operation, plans were drawn up, and all that remained to put an abrupt end to this new “perverter” was to apprehend the culprit. That was all, but that was much when God was on the side of the man sought.

Moved by the same prompting that caused Mary and Joseph to take Jesus as a babe from Bethlehem to Egypt, the few believers at Damascus effected an escape for Paul by placing him in an improvised elevator made of a basket and a rope and letting him down over the wall. Doubtless their hearts still feared for his safety as he left the basket and disappeared into the darkness of the night unarmed and unescorted, but the Lord was with him and brought him to Jerusalem where he sought contact with other believers.

Of the numberless affiliations enjoyed by those of “like precious faith,” none was ever more heavily freighted with the element of surprise than when Saul of Tarsus came to the apostles at Jerusalem. Perhaps none ever produced greater concern. The psychological reaction was pronounced and the opposition at first was unanimous. Fear for the welfare of the local church was quickly evidenced and bewilderment was readily apparent. Ostensibly, they thought, these new tactics by this human arch-enemy of Christianity were a subtle means for a quick and telling blow-a clever plan to nullify their testimony. Regardless of the reports about his conversion, they could not be deceived so easily. Somehow, they seemed to think that something was begun by this move which a refusal on their part would not entirely counteract. Their old foe was pounding at their door, so it seemed.

Paul’s failure to find fellowship.

It was the most likely thing in all the world for this new Christian to seek fellowship among those of like precious faith. Any earnest Christian would do likewise. Immediately upon his arrival, “he assayed to join himself to the disciples.” His approach was met with instant refusal.

This was hardly surprising to him, nor was he perturbed. He was ever one to take matters in his stride and to let God work out the problems. Their refusal to fellowship him in their midst was caused, first, by their distress at his presence. Verse 26 (Acts 9:26) states, “They were all afraid of him.” That seems like a bona fide objection. It hardly seems possible, however, that Peter could

have been included in the “all” yet he cowered once before a damsel who pointed him out as being a friend to Jesus.

Yes, it is very likely that Peter was in the group which was afraid of this erstwhile persecutor; but, in fairness to Peter, it must be explained that he was no longer the cowardly one who once denied his Lord. Perhaps it was caution more than fear, but they, nevertheless, refused to associate with Paul. Who knew better than these Christian leaders at Jerusalem what a constant threat this man had been to the lives of any and all who dared to witness for Christ? He had made atrocious attempts to exterminate that small coterie of witnesses at Jerusalem which formed the nucleus of the whole church militant. It was a literal fear they possessed which seemed most justifiable. His presence in Jerusalem, they reasoned, was a cause for great concern and constituted a danger of the first order.

They could not for a moment even think of receiving Paul into their company because of their disbelief in his profession. They “believed not that Saul was a disciple.” This was due either to a lack of known proof concerning his new birth or an underestimate of the transforming power of the Lord. It must be remembered that this was not very long after Paul had met the Lord, perhaps a matter of months. News, of course, had filtered in from various sources but they had looked upon it askance. They attached little value to statements coming indirectly through believers in other parts.

What reaction had been occasioned in Jewish officialdom at Jerusalem through the loss of this deputized persecutor could have been construed by the cautious apostles as propaganda in a strategical plan for the furtherance of their cause. The disciples knew about fifth columnists because of Judas. They remembered the admonition of the Lord about wolves coming in sheep’s clothing, and had they not, hardly two years previously, seen Ananias and Sapphira stricken in death before their very presence because of misrepresentation? No, the evidence was not sufficiently convincing. They could not welcome him.

It was not an attitude of reluctance among the apostles because of Paul’s past record; it was an act of rejection because they lacked the proper knowledge concerning his present status. What sincere body with the proper Bible standard could have done otherwise? Had they been present along the Damascus road when the Lord intercepted him in his journey; had they seen the little roaring tiger humbled as a tractable lamb; or had those who were present been competent discerners of the Lord’s operations, then would it have been different. As it was, the risk involved was too alarming. Of course, not one of those spirit-filled men would question for one moment the greatness of God’s power in transforming the worst of sinners.

Had they not been eye witnesses to the phenomenal display of the Holy Spirit’s work on the day of Pentecost when three thousand souls were brought from their hopelessness into the reality of transforming grace? Had not Peter and John, in particular, seen the whole city of Samaria set aglow with the joy of Christ through Philip’s one message? Could not God save such as Saul? Could He not make the wrath of man to praise Him? Of this fact, there was not so much as a shadow of doubt, but whether this noted Pharisaical antagonist had exercised faith in the provisions of the cross was a matter that utterly lacked confirmation. Thus, they were not disposed to offer the right hand of fellowship.

Paul was befriended by Barnabas.

While Acts 9:26 plainly states that “all” were afraid of Saul, the following verse opens with the words “but Barnabas took him.”

These words by no means contradict the previous verse. They clearly prove how God can cause a person to move in the midst of fear and in the face of danger to accomplish His will. Why did God single out Barnabas in preference to any other man in the company? Was it because he was more discerning or more valorous than the others? No, these were hardly the reasons.

It is a well known fact that certain types of personalities fit into certain situations when other types would inevitably fail. Peter would not have been a likely one to meet a man like Saul in his Christian infancy and held in suspicion as he was. Barnabas possessed traits not noticeably found in any of the others, including the beloved John. When the apostles first met this devout son of a Levite from Cyprus, they were so impressed with his sweet Christian disposition and his quiet, even temperament that they changed his name from Joses to Barnabas which meant “the son of consolation” (Acts 4:36).

Here is a definite clue as to why he was commissioned for this important duty-something of a liaison officer or an intermediary. There was Saul, a new Christian, compelled to flee Damascus for his life because he had become a Christian and yet barred from the company of Christians. This son of consolation was a friend indeed to a man in need.

Barnabas did two things after establishing the contact.

First, he listened to Saul’s testimony which was related in detail with vividness and convincing force. Another might have thought of it as a fantastic “Rudolph Hess stunt” and that he still retained a loyalty to those who sought the lives of faithful Christians. Not so with Barnabas. His emotions were greatly stirred as the unfolding story confirmed the fact that this man had, in truth, come to grips with the Christ of Calvary and that the nature of God had been stamped upon his soul. It was a complete coverage of the facts incident to his conversion and commission. It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of Barnabas when the testimony was terminated. His very countenance was indicative of his pleasure. His heart was overwhelmed. All the doubts relative to the genuineness of this man’s conversion were at once and forever dissipated. He must have said, “With Ananias, I, too, salute you as ‘Brother Paul.’ You are one with us in the bonds of Christ. Make ready, and grant me the privilege of escorting you to the brethren.”

The next thing that Barnabas did is evident. He led Paul to the apostles.

How symbolical was the sight. So recently the steps of these two men had followed in vastly divergent courses, their aims had been diametrically opposite; their philosophies had been dissonant; their religious ideas had been incompatible, and the one had threatened the life of the other. Now, they walk together, reconciled, one in Christ, rejoicing in a common salvation. Paul no longer filled this disciple’s heart with fear nor troubled his mind with suspicion; and Barnabas was no longer a despised religionist who had no right to live. Everything was different now as two men, one slight and the other tall, negotiated the distance as quickly as possible to meet the apostles on that most memorable occasion.

Paul was received on profession of faith.

The humble meeting quarters where God's anointed few assembled for prayer and praise and study had become a hallowed place. However drab and unsightly the surroundings, there had been unmistakable verification of their Lord's precious promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

Their hearts were knitted together in love and their souls were rapturously joyful as their testimonies blended into a concert of doxology. They spoke about God's boundless mercies in salvation and the transcendent riches of His grace. The atmosphere was most elevating. Now, into their assembly room, into their very presence, came the one who, above all others, had tried strenuously to destroy all that they held transcendently dear. The atmosphere was at once tense with apprehension. Whether they were still fearful of him or not, he stood before them. He was in their midst. Saul of Tarsus was in their meeting. The only alleviating factor was that Barnabas, a most trustworthy member of their company, had brought him.

At the most opportune moment, prompted by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas arose to make the introduction. "My beloved Brethren in Christ," he began with all the graciousness that had so greatly endeared him to their hearts, "it is with the most extreme pleasure that I commend to you Brother Paul."

These words were like the Balm of Gilead to relax the strained nerves and fearful hearts of a people who already had been hounded by a most unscrupulous adversary. The fact that Paul was accepted as a brother by Barnabas and commended by him to their fellowship brought to them sweet assurance and much joy. What else could they require?

But Barnabas spoke on, saying, "Brother Paul saw the Lord and was blinded by the brilliance of His effulgent glory and he heard the Lord speak. The proof of his conversion inheres in the fact that he preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and for this cause, he had to flee for his life for the Jews had sought to kill him."

Much is left for our imagination, the corroboration by Paul of all that Barnabas had related, a brief personal testimony, the handclasps, the greetings, the praise and thanksgiving.

This was indeed the doing of the Lord and it was marvellous in their eyes. There was no further formality. There was no need for it. Paul was one of their company and he was their newest brother in Christ.

Paul enjoyed a new association.

"And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." This was a new realm of conduct, a new sphere of companionship. He was with them.

This signifies more than social relationship. He was with them positionally. The same power that had wrought so wonderfully in his life had worked in theirs. The conditions were different but the accomplishment was the same. They were journeying with new hope to a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. He was travelling the same path of faith. They were accepted in the Beloved and numbered among the children of God. He was a member of the same heavenly family. What Calvary had done for them, it had also done for him. Their hope was his; all aims and anticipations were the same; they shared alike in a common salvation where seniority rights and favoritism are both foreign and unacceptable.

Paul soon found to his joy that he was with them practically, “coming in and going out at Jerusalem.” This was, of course, divinely intended and was there humanly endorsed by discerning men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

While the Christian acknowledges no supreme spiritual authority but that which comes from heaven, there was a sense in which Jerusalem was acknowledged as the headquarters of the early Church. Then, Paul qualified as being one of the official staff. He went out on preaching assignments and came back to the Jerusalem assembly for fellowship. The invaluable contribution made by him was unquestioned by the other apostles and surely appreciated as well by them, but the blessing it was to his own life and his establishment in the ministry to which he had been called remained to be seen.

Throughout his Christian career, Paul guarded carefully against any propensity to indulge in matters pertaining to his own self-enjoyment. From the very commencement of his ministry he was determined to glory only in the cross of Christ. The disciples quickly reposed confidence in him, cherished his brotherly affection, respected his ability and greatly admired his ministerial accomplishments. Barnabas, in particular, was to become an intimate associate of the one who was Christianity’s greatest apostle.

Paul became the first Christian apologist.

A very familiar description is used with frequency concerning the character of Paul’s oral ministry. “He spake boldly.”

Sooner or later this kind of preaching stirs up the active enmity of Satan and some of his emissaries make vocal his objections. Being the very embodiment of pride, too much pressure cannot be endured without retaliation.

God’s people too frequently forget that the enemy of all that is high and holy is active and will prevail if we are not in the place where God can grant the victory. This fearless advocate of the gospel preached with power, proving the truth of his message, and this became most provocative to many of his day.

The Grecian Jews (Acts 9:29), like their forefather Cain, were too refined to place any credence in a religion based upon the shedding of blood, so they challenged Paul to a debate. Whatever may have been the extent of his training in polemics or his experience in argumentation, nothing about Paul is clearer than his ability to defend the faith. Judges were not necessary in his debates. The outcome was always certain. His opponents almost invariably displayed their acknowledgment of defeat by crying for his life.

At Damascus, his message of Calvary ran counterwise to their creed and they sought to kill him. Then, the preaching of the cross conflicted with Grecian culture; and, failing to silence their accused fanatic in oral combat, they tried to slay him.

To have one of Paul’s academic training, supported by spiritual depth and animated by unexcelled fearlessness, was a great asset indeed to the young church at Jerusalem, and they blessed the day that Barnabas led him into their midst. He was an inspiration of rare proportions to the other apostles, and the devil had to dip deeply into his repertoire of deceptive schemes to play his cards against this new figure in the field of Christian activity. One by one, his cohorts fell before the

unflinching attacks of this dauntless personality who refused to be controverted in his arguments or thwarted in his actions. It was the invincible power of Christ through one who had yielded himself fully, and no one recognized this more than Satan. He could not destroy the power, but he sought to dispose of the vessel.

Paul returned to Tarsus. “Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him forth to Tarsus” (Acts 9:30).

Once again, by protecting Providence, his life was spared; and, through this means of expulsion, the Lord dispatched him to another assignment. This move brought Paul to the place of his birth. Tarsus had given to the world the most prominent personage since the days of Moses, but it required the “dark room” of time to develop the portrait of greatness. An oil painting is not nearly so pleasing to the eye that is close to it. His return was that of a victor but how unaware were the townsfolk. There were no ceremonies, no medals, no citations. Nor would Paul have had it so. He had seen the garlands of leaves awarded the Olympic winners which faded and crumbled so soon, even as the glory they betokened. His awards were of the Lord. They would never lose their luster but would shine as the stars forever. And even though the whole of Tarsus were unaware of the significance of the change that had been wrought in the life of this one citizen, all the world would know, in due course, and even eternity would re-echo the account of a sinner saved by grace and used to the blessing of countless numbers.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

01.15 Paul And The Parental Hearth

CHAPTER FIFTEEN PAUL AND THE PARENTAL HEARTH

“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other,

even as God also in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32)

We could wish for a more complete biographical account of Paul, especially as touching upon his early home life. What material is extant is more transcendental than documentary, and inferential comments permit too readily of speculation. There is ample suggestion, well-founded, to support the thought of exceptional training. Our acquaintanceship with any derogatory aspect of his life, before conversion, is restricted to his bitter aversion to the Christian people and their position.

This, in a sense, was complimentary to the strictness of his Jewish teaching. His schooling indicated home encouragement, and his connection with Jewish leaders bespoke for him the best of moral standards. If what he advanced as counsel to others is a concomitant to his own ideals, then, he was the possessor of the highest principles which, basically, result from proper attention in those more tender years. One thing is evident: when Christ entered his life and the Holy Spirit endowed him with heavenly wisdom, he gave to men the most thorough advice regarding the home.

Paul propounded love as the premise of home building.

The basic principles of better behavior issue from a quality known as love. It is love in its many manifestations which furnishes the endearment, the patience, the sympathy and the kindness which combine to make home ties strong and enduring, and friendships true and abiding. It is love which enables diverse personalities to delight in the continued company of one another.

Husbands are directed toward Christ for the standard of headship, the authority of which is to be exercised in love. In fact, love is the power that operates a home as evidenced in providing, in protecting, and in promoting. Paul was pointed in his exhortations to the head of the home. “Husbands,” said he, “love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it . . . so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:25; Ephesians 5:28). This is a holy standard. Christ set His love upon His bride (the Church) in eternity past and gave His life for her redemption.

Now, He prepares her eternal abode and provides her an incorruptible, unfading inheritance. With tenderness, He promised to care, to cleanse and to come for her. Then, the Apostle turns to the companion and mother-to-be, adding his timely counsel: “Let the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

If there is disunity between the husband and wife, who are the makers of the home, there can be little promise of developing any of the finer characteristics of home life. In a more general manner, the Apostle applied the principles of love to the whole family. He had a workable formula for the

surmounting of differences which rise from varying dispositions and affected temperaments. It was this:

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

Paul prescribed pre-marital compatibility.

Marriage is a decision of consequence. He who knows the end from the beginning has sounded forth in clarion notes the warning against ill-advised and inevitably dangerous procedure in marital anticipations. We have not only the advice of Paul on the subject, but his firm commands as well-instruction Divinely inspired.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,” was his unequivocal statement. This does not refer exclusively to the subject at hand, but it covers the matter with unquestionable pertinence. Compatibility, according to this precept, does not consist merely of corresponding ideals, or like morals, or similar training nor yet of membership in the same church. The word “ye” denotes born-again people.

This is Christian instruction; and, therefore, the counsel of God for His own dear people. However well-mated a couple may seem to be, it is a flagrant violation of the Divine will for a Christian to become yoked in marriage with one who rejects salvation and thereby tramples underfoot the blood of the Son of God. At once Divine favor is eclipsed.

Marriage is ordained in the very laws of our being, but, He Who ordained this relationship, clearly and emphatically insists that it is to be “ONLY IN THE LORD” (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Paul enunciated these words with force, but many Christians have deliberately ignored them, choosing rather the affections of an unbelieving partner in preference to the honour and blessing and companionship of the eternal God. Where there is spiritual incompatibility in marriage, there is at once an imperfect foundation on which a couple tries in vain to erect a proper superstructure. Domestic difficulty, child delinquency and divorce, all are attributable to misapplication of the Divine regulations governing marriage and its attendant responsibilities.

Those who close their eyes and stop their ears to heavenly counsel must inevitably prove that “the way of the transgressor is hard.” One thing is clear despite the reasoning of blinded love: God firmly forbids a believer to marry an unbeliever.

Paul proposed prenatal ponderings.

The period of parental expectancy is a time of deliberation. “Deliberation” means to weigh in mind or to carefully consider. Who knows, but God, the many and varied thoughts which fill the mind of an expectant mother? During these months of waiting, the mother-to-be cannot but dream of happy, holy experiences with and for the one she carries so near to her heart. A Christian woman would think Christian thoughts, pray for Divine blessing, and hope for spiritual joy. The unchristian woman thinks, too, and dreams, as well, but how can she have Christ in her thoughts when she does not have Him in her heart? What she plans and what she does is without the consciousness of God’s presence and blessing.

Paul, by heavenly direction, delineated many important factors which merit careful consideration.

When the Corinthian Christians sought his advice relative to marital relations (1 Corinthians 7:1), he prefaced his answer by inquiring, “What? know ye not your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”

To weigh this fact in mind is a certain solution for many problems in all eras. In keeping with this query is the additional instruction, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

What tonic of greater potency could be found to stimulate the soul to more pleasant frames than to be flooded with the presence of God? Then, the Apostle called for unceasing prayer, cleansing of heart and mind, the study of the Bible, circumspect behavior and joyful melody in the heart. The husband was specifically required to love his wife “even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it.”

This was designed to promote sympathy and faithfulness so necessary for the trials incident to child-bearing. Together, the Christian parents should envisage their offspring serving the Lord. A mother of six missionaries is said to have repaired to a quiet trysting place on the day of her wedding where she prayed most solemnly, “O Lord, I am not prepared to give birth to one child that will not honour Thee.” This is what makes homes Christian.

Paul proffered postnatal considerations.

The postnatal period is a time of dedication. Hannah is one of the best illustrations available. Let us note her own statement which was uttered when she went before the Lord to worship, “For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he liveth, he shall be lent to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:27-28).

The dedication of children is not a ritualistic formality, but a humble demonstration of parental desire to place at the disposal of the Giver all that He has entrusted to them. Its real significance inheres in the hearts of the parents and not in the appearance of the act. When once it is said, “Lord, this child is thine,” then it is incumbent upon the parents to do all in their power to create the right atmosphere and to provide the proper encouragement for the child’s development in Christian ideals.

It proves to be a good psychological gesture to apprise the children in later years of that act of their dedication to God. This can be accomplished in story to the small children and by kindly reminders to the older ones. It is even appropriate and often profitable to pray in their hearing for its fulfillment.

We recall, with pleasure, the testimony of a man to the effectiveness of this procedure. He related how his mother wrote a poem and placed it in the front of a gift Bible to him. It read, in part:

“I gave you to God in your cradle, my boy,

I have taught you the best that I knew;

And as long as His mercy permits me to live,

I shall never cease praying for you." The cover of that Bible was worn and the pages were torn; in fact, the mother's writing was scarcely legible, but it had served its purpose. With moistened eyes, the man added, "Mother has long since gone to glory, and I have wandered far and wide, but her message lingers still."

Paul knew what proficient imitators and keen observers are little children. Thus, he counseled, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Ephesians 4:29). He also urged that parents "walk circumspectly" (Ephesians 5:15), which means, that from every conceivable angle, the life should be commending in character.

A child is a realist. He notices far more than is revealed. A certain little lad left his toys one day to ask his mother, "Does God look like daddy?" The mother, attempting to gain her equilibrium, lost through this abrupt and unexpected question, enquired as to why her son was seeking this knowledge. His explanation was simple. He was merely wondering, "Does God always have a cigar in His mouth?" Doubtless, the most indelible impressions are those registered in early, formative years. Thus, the Holy Spirit is emphatic in His didactical directives. The parents' submission to each other is qualified by the phrase, "in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). With this qualification accepted and applied, neither would distrust the other. Then, peace and pleasantness would permeate the home, fellowship and joy would ingratiate the environment and children would find the atmosphere conducive to proper development.

Paul pressed the matter of parental concern.

The children of a family can be agents of joy or the producers of sorrow. Obedience is the deciding factor. Thus, it is a Divine command that children obey their parents in the Lord. Obedience is the product of honour. Perhaps that is why a promise is added to the Lord's command for children to honour their parents.

Malachi said, "Honour is due unto a father" (Malachi 1:6). God rewards honor by honoring (1 Samuel 2:30). Paul explained how honour is elicited from children by the parents. "And ye fathers," he urged, "provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

The parental period is the time of direction and of counsel. Parental concern allows no cessation. The day of training may and does terminate, but not until children are established in the basic principles of Christian conduct and relationship. Then, in the very nature or things, when they move out from the parental hearth to find their respective places in life, a nation has worthwhile citizens, God has true witnesses, and parents experience the crowning glory of duty well done. This applies not only to the progenitors and bearers of children, but also to those who stand in loco parentis, for the responsibility is just as pressing on the part of foster parents. Training greatly affects destiny.

Paul indicated unusual pleasure in recalling the faith of Timothy. "I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5).

He attributed Timothy's zeal, in a large measure, to the example of a godly mother and saintly grandmother. Paul seemed to have had a close acquaintanceship with these maternal

personalities. Their faith, to his mind, was genuine and firm. It could not be easily forgotten. He was persuaded that this same faith had been inculcated in young Timothy. It will be noticed that the Apostle was referring to a “dwelling or continuing” faith. He spoke about a mother’s influence evident in her daughter, and that daughter’s faith deeply implanted in the life of a son. This is but one indication of the far-reaching effect of a godly home. “Like parent, like child” is a maxim of some basic truth.

On another occasion, Paul touched on the value of Bible teaching in the home. “And that from a child,” he reminded Timothy, “thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

This reference yields several enlightening thoughts.

First, there was parental belief in the power of the Scriptures to make one wise.

Second, there was parental confidence in the fact that the Scriptures lead to salvation.

Third, there was careful parental attention to the teaching of Scripture in the home.

Fourth, there was application on the part of the child in learning the Scriptures.

A genuinely Christian home is characterized by the prominence of the Bible in the love and the life of the family.

Basic domestic principles are universal and immutable. Home is the rallying place of the affections, where kindred hearts become inseparably entwined about each other. It is the place where mutual compromise and loving forbearance develop a sympathy and consideration which greatly affect the whole of one’s life. It is the medium through which come the richest and truest joys of earth.

Paul was not acquainted with day schools and nurseries as a convenience for career mothers in an unbalanced economy. He contended the proper employment for wives and mothers was that of “keepers of the home” (Titus 2:5). They were called upon to be diligent in the care of their husbands and of their children.

If there is failure here, the home structure is threatened with collapse. Maternal home neglect is the harbinger of juvenile delinquency and adult crime. If the mother; according to the Apostle’s teaching, is “discreet and chaste,” then her heart becomes the child’s schoolroom and her knee his altar. Through her loving direction, the tender lessons of truth and right are taught and learned. Before the fathers, Paul laid this strong statement: “If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel” (1 Timothy 5:8).

The Lord Jesus hallowed a humble home in Nazareth by His presence there. He was very man but not variable like man. He Faced the same vicissitudes but without vacillation. We are assured that the Lord is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works (Psalms 145:17).

Based upon these irrefutable facts, we can safely assume that His every behavior in domestic matters constituted a perfect example.

The Scriptures state that “He went down with them to Nazareth.” That is, He lived there, in a home, under ordinary conditions with Mary and Joseph. Many have inferred that Jesus helped Joseph in the duties of his trade as a carpenter, building and repairing, wielding the hammer and saw. This could all be true, but the nugget of truth most pertinent to our consideration is that He “was subject unto them.” While being obedient unto His heavenly Father (Php 2:8), He was also obedient to the parents of the home in which the Divine purpose had placed Him. While being submissive to God, He was subservient to man. His was a perfect example indeed.

The Apostle was striving for the loftiest of domestic ideals and the richest family benediction in his instructions for the home. His precepts were marked by accurate proportion and true perspective. He was conveying principles applicable to all people for every age.

These instructions assured, and still assure, the maximum of joy and happiness, and win for a family internal comfort and external esteem.

In brief, they simply called for a father to support his family, the wife to submit to her husband as unto the Lord, the parents to love and to train their children, the children to honour and to obey their parents, and together, to reverence, to worship and to serve the Lord.

What a happy, holy estate would be the experience of families if God’s Word were given its rightful place! The paternal hearth must prevail as the rallying place of the affections and the basic training ground for earth’s pilgrims.

~ end of chapter 15 ~

01.16 Paul And The Matter Of Missions

CHAPTER SIXTEEN PAUL AND THE MATTER OF MISSIONS

“The Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work

whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2)

One day Paul stood before the cold cynicism of Herod Agrippa II. He was apprehended for affirming that Jesus still lives. The Emperor entered the hearing chamber “with great pomp” for which all the Herods were noted, while the accused was brought in, by contrast, as a despicable creature in all the humility of forced subjection. The prisoner was granted the right to speak in his own defense. Then ensued that immortal rehearsal, in detail, of his glorious conversion to Christ. At the very height of his impassioned appeal, utterly impervious to regal scrutiny and legal operations, Paul firmly avowed, “O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”

Here is a clue to the Apostle’s unprecedented and unrivalled missionary zeal. A heavenly vision is prerequisite to a world vision.

- We must see Christ dying before we can see men dead.

- We must see Christ risen before we can see men rising.

- We must hear Christ calling before we can hear men crying.

Paul had a vision, yet even a vision was not sufficient. There must be obedience-an acceptance of the challenge and an unswerving devotion to the cause. In this respect Paul and Barnabas were the belated vanguard of a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6).

It was undoubtedly the design of the Lord God for His covenant people to engage in world-wide missionary endeavor, but their whole history has been sadly discolored with the darkness of disobedience. Jonah’s reluctance to go to the Gentile city of Nineveh is a mute testimony to this disturbing truth.

The seventy whom Jesus sent forth without purse or scrip or shoes soon lost their vision and reveled in secondary matters. Even Peter was slow to take the gospel to the nations; and when he did, his brethren in Judea took him to task, saying, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.”

Philip, by special commission of the Holy Spirit, rushed toward Gaza and won an Ethiopian to Christ; but we are forced to wait until the thirteenth chapter of Acts, to find a descendant of Jacob launching out on an earnest and extensive missionary venture. The effort Paul and Barnabas inaugurated has suffered in varying degrees during the intervening centuries; but, today, godly men and women are carrying the blood-stained banner of the cross to the remotest domains of mankind.

The Church at Antioch, strangely enough a Gentile city, furnished the two Jewish missionaries who became the pioneers of Christian missions. This Church was a veritable beehive of activity, and, while not cited in Scripture as a model for other assemblies to emulate, it is recorded as an encouragement to all. There was such spiritual health and wholesomeness there that the Holy Spirit looked upon it with the greatest of favour. Their emphasis was right to begin with for “they ministered to the Lord.” This left little room for petty selfishnesses or denominational pride.

They had “prophets and teachers” which afforded them every opportunity of becoming rooted and grounded in the Truth. Among their leaders were Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen and Paul. This was a teaching Church, the kind which trains workers who sense the need of the fields and who respond to the call of the Spirit. That assembly which is willing to send and support its sons and daughters in the service may expect gracious visitations of the Holy Spirit with His gentle instruction, “Separate them unto Me for the work whereunto I have called them.”

This is the design of Truth.

In His high priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ said to the Father, “Sanctify them through Thy Truth; Thy Word is Truth.” This is exactly what was transpiring at the Antioch Church. Two men were being set apart by the work of the Spirit and the teaching of the Word of Truth. One does not go very far into the Sacred Volume without an awareness that the challenge of the Scriptures comes with atomic force to sever one from all natural aspirations and secular ties. This accounts for the apparent reckless abandon which the willing “called one” evidences in leaving kindred and acquaintance and familiar scenes to sally forth to unseeded soil with the sweetest story ever told.

The missionary, of all the Lord’s servants, must know that the Word is “quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart is descriptive of the practical effect of the Scriptures. Faithfully they are released from the dedicated lips of God’s spokesman. Through space they pass unseen, enter upon the auditory system and reach the heart. At once they go to work. They are particles of high potency. Despite the ofttimes deceptive outer appearance of a person, the challenge of Truth stirs up a violent struggle within. It questions the selfishness and pathetic unconcern for the lost and dying; it calls for a holy surrender. The fields white unto harvest then loom so prominently on the horizon of that one’s thoughts that all else becomes indistinct and distorted.

A compassion for the heathen never before known begins to develop. The heart beat is quickened. An issue is at hand. Excuses germinate in great numbers which is a diabolical stratagem of the Devil to frustrate the assignment from heavenly headquarters.

When the Lord of the Harvest moves upon a heart, Satan invariably counters. Then comes the necessity of choosing who the master of the life will be. This is one critical moment when the heavenly vision calls for heart obedience. It is the design of Truth to lead us into obedience to the divine commission.

This is the desire of Christ.

The prominent pedagogical procedure in Scripture is that of precept and example-the statement of principle propounded, then the illustration produced. This was the usual method in the teachings of Christ, and He, Himself, was frequently the example.

He urged upon men to do the will of God; then He prayed, “Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Pursuant to His resurrection, Jesus appeared suddenly to the ten disciples whose fear was soon allayed by his comforting salutation, “Peace be unto you.” “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” In the midst of this joyful yet solemn and significant meeting, the Master said with evident and unquestioned authority, “As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21).

Jesus had already made it plain that He came not to be ministered unto but to minister; and, further, that the servant is no greater than his Lord. Those whom He had called were to minister to others. This was the means in the divine economy of propagating the good news of redemption. Christians are heralds of the gospel and should never hesitate to launch forth in faithful service. Paul was one of the few who readily realized this fact.

Now, how did the Father send Jesus? If this can be partly ascertained, then may we at least faintly know how we are sent. Jesus was sent in humbleness. “He made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant . . . and humbled himself” (Php 2:7-8).

When the Holy Spirit separates one for a ministry, in this sense, He makes such an one to conform to the Lord. He separates one from his pride as Christ was separated from His glory and makes one humble. Paul said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

The Saviour was sent to the ungrateful; so is the servant. Ezekiel was warned about the lack of appreciation which would meet him. He was told to expect bitter and offensive words as though he were being pricked with briars and thorns. Those whom Jesus came to serve spoke blasphemous words against Him; those whom he came to save rent His garments, and spiked Him to a tree. He sends His servants into the same cruel world, saying, “As the world hated Me, so will it hate you.” Jesus was sent to be “God’s faithful and True” servant (Revelation 19:11). Before the dreadful scene at Calvary was enacted, He lifted His eyes toward heaven and affirmed, “I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

He wants us to be faithful stewards, doing well the work He has committed to our trust. Paul had great joy in his final earthly moment when he was able, by the grace of God, to say, “I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”

This is the demand of the field.

If there were no field of service, there would be no call for servants. If the need were not great, the demand would not be urgent; but there is a field and there is a need; there is also urgency. Jesus looked upon the world of lost men and women with great compassion “because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”

He saw them as sheep fainting, faltering, forsaken and forgotten, broken, bleeding and bleating. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few” (Matthew 9:37). The call of Barnabas and Saul by the Holy Spirit constituted the initial step in a great

Christian missionary movement which has made marvellous advances throughout most of the earth.

The demand of the field makes no allowance for delay. Jesus urged, “Say not ye there are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already unto harvest” (John 4:35).

All that the field requires is an open eye and a seeing mind. If we have the mind of Christ, then we, too, shall have compassion. If we are obedient, we will go-go as He wills and where He leads.

One look was sufficient for Paul to say, “I am debtor to the whole world.” He had an open eye to see the perishing throngs, and a heart to pity. He was brought to tears because of their sad estate. Has the church of Jesus Christ become so blinded with the glitter of self-interest that it cannot see the whitened fields? Has its vision become so distorted that it cannot look with compassion upon the poor deluded folk who will miss heaven unless they learn of Christ the Door? The field strongly demands that we become separated unto the work of His calling.

This is the delight of the true servant.

No truth is more irrefutably established than the fact that a Christian never knows real joy until he has found the center of God’s will. All other soul enjoyment is either partial or utterly superficial. Jesus said, “I delight to do Thy will, O God.” Paul smiled at difficulties and hardships as he expressed his foremost desire, “That I might finish my course with joy.”

Wherever he went, he had the motivating assurance that he had been called by the Holy Ghost and his service for the Lord produced melody in his heart continually. Even at midnight, in a dark dungeon at Philippi, aching with bodily discomforts, he could sing.

Being in God’s will guarantees results through the Spirit and results are always gratifying. Imagine Paul’s delight as Lydia bowed at the foot of the cross and came out of heathen darkness, or as the jailer pleaded for deliverance from his fear.

Were not these compensating factors for any cost that might have been exacted? Such experiences were multiplied over and over. As a mother forgets the travail in the joy of seeing her babe, even so, Paul could forget the sorrows of maltreatment as he looked upon his children in the faith whom he had begotten unto the Lord. “Ye are my crown and my rejoicing,” he exulted. It was his pleasure always to minister to others.

The Shulamite once lamented, “They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept” (Song of Solomon 1:6). Later, there is an entirely different attitude. “Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish” (Song of Solomon 7:12).

The first reference is vividly illustrative of those who do only what they are forced to do, and that without joy, lamenting the fact that their own vineyard (interests) is being neglected-too many other responsibilities to do service for the Lord. In the latter reference, there is eagerness, expectation and rejoicing. The whole change in attitude was occasioned by the presence and companionship of the bridegroom, “Come, my beloved, let US go forth into the field” (Song of Solomon 7:11). Our bridegroom has said, “Go . . . and lo, I am WITH YOU alway, even unto the end of the world [consummation of the age].” In His company, there is blessing and joy.

This is the doing of the Spirit.

There are certain aspects in the development of church procedures which the Lord reserved exclusively for Himself.

An angel could be entrusted to inform Philip, the evangelist, to go toward Gaza; but the Holy Spirit must tell him when to make the contact with the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29).

When Paul would have gone from Galatia to Asia to preach the Word, he was “forbidden of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 16:6).

When he and his company would have gone from Mysia into Bithynia, “The Spirit suffered them not.”

As the Lord of the Harvest, He directs the traffic of servants. It is He Who gives the green or the red light. Paul may sow and Apollos may water, but God gives the increase. Yet, God must have human agency through which to work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to place the labourers in the field. The work of the Holy Spirit in marshalling forces is threefold.

First, He calls. This is the main significance in the statement, “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul.” He was calling these two men. It was a distinct summons which was understood both by the men themselves and by the church of which they were a part. There was no question, no hesitance, no misgivings. The call was not sought by Barnabas and Paul. It was clearly a divine call. God wanted them for a particular work at that particular time, and the great Administrator simply knocked at their heart’s door and delivered the commission. The whole church soon knew about it.

These two brethren were dearly beloved and greatly appreciated, but there was no lamentation. Spirit-filled people want always that God shall have His wonderful way.

The next step the Holy Spirit takes is a blessed assurance to the called one, for He leads.

Otherwise, how could men, even of the caliber of Barnabas and Paul, know each successive move? They could not; nor can we. The testimony of Peter is helpful in this connection. His journey toward a meeting place of Gentiles was without precedent, but he went. Why? “The Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting” (Acts 11:12).

“He leadeth me, O blessed thought,

O words with heavenly comfort fraught.”

I would like to know just where His holy plans for my life may take me, but I do not know; I need not know. It is enough just to know that He knows and that He leads. It was just such a confident attitude that made Paul the mighty servant he was.

Then, the Holy Spirit not only calls and leads, but He definitely empowers. Any task to which He calls man is too great for man. Any work into which He leads us is too demanding for our limited resources. How little practical importance we attach to the unqualified statement of our Lord, Who wisely counseled, “Without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5).

He put the treasure in an earthen vessel that the power may be of God. To accomplish His work the Holy Spirit requires sanctified vessels-clean channels through which His boundless power may

be conducted. He even does the sanctifying. All we need to do is resign willingly to His blessed leadership. This is the dread of Satan.

Every dedicated and trained worker the Holy Spirit calls from a church is a strong blow to the devil, and his strategy is to limit the number set forth. The success of his counter-measures is to be viewed with the greatest concern. His opposition can be summed up in three words; namely, hate, hurt and hinder.

- His hatred is the antithesis of God's love;

- His hurting is the blighting effect he has upon believers' obedience;

- His hindering is but the placing of hurdles in the servant's course.

He strikes at the headwaters in order to pollute the stream. If schools and lesson material can be sabotaged, the churches plunged into compromise and the home standard lowered, he has effectively cut off the sadly needed help for the fields now white unto harvest. The Apostle knew from what source his opposition came.

"Wherefore, we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18).

Many sincere and unsuspecting Christian people frown upon disloyalty to Christ but are themselves the recipients of Satanic bribes, and that is treason. Knowing what we do of his tactics, it is not at all hard to conceive that Satan would promote a courtship to prevent a missionary from reaching the field. God's people are burdened with shackles and bent with a multiplicity of matters almost to the saturation point. Then it seems so legitimate to plead, "I haven't time."

God wants to be first in our lives. He wants us to be free to do His will. Any condition that keeps us from being available to do His bidding has been caused by enemy contravention. Any movement among the mulberry bushes which would indicate a revival or the volunteering of young folk for the field, immediately sends the serpent scurrying into a huddle with his devilish cohorts to adopt and apply some counter offensive. He dreads any work of the Spirit which strikes vitally at his plans of destruction.

It is the dream of angels.

" . . . but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12).

The context from which this verse is taken is concerned about the salvation of souls (1 Peter 1:9). Peter said the prophets predicted and the angels peer, but we, by the grace of God may preach it.

The picture is that of the holy angels looking over the parapet of heaven, peering into this matter of men bearing a heavenly message. They regarded only the cherubim and seraphim as being proper conveyors of such precious cargoes, but now it is men-men who once were enemies of God, formerly members of the family of Satan, so recently without hope and without God.

How could angels understand the work of the cross? Only those who were brought out of the pit and from the miry clay (Psalms 40:2) can enjoy the marvellous transforming value of the blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without spot and blemish.

Some of us may have a limited appreciation of the operations of the angels as they move in their orbit of divine planning, but we cherish the thought that God has vouchsafed to us, poor sinners saved by His matchless grace, a work of such transcendent importance that the angels in glory would gladly exchange positions with us if they could. They peer into our missionary activities with the greatest curiosity.

Oh, that we might learn, with Paul, and from him, something of the exalted blessing which is ours to be labourers together with the all-wise and infinite God. Surely, His service would no longer seem commonplace.

The honour would become overwhelming.

Just as the Holy Spirit called and commissioned Barnabas and Saul, even so He is calling to willing ones today, and commanding the churches to loose their cherished sons and daughters for world-wide assignments where angels cannot go!

“Give to God your gift, my brother;

He’ll not need to seek another,

You will do.

He will add His blessing to it;

Then the both of you will do it - God and you.”

~ end of chapter 16 ~

01.17 Paul's Intriguing Travelogue

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN PAUL'S INTRIGUING TRAVELOGUE "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) The Lord kept Paul's diary. He commissioned Dr. Luke to write it, and then preserved it where records never become soiled with years. While other institutions lie buried beneath the ruins of earth or wax latent in the corrosive rust and moss of age, the Bible remains unaffected by the elements of time. Because of this fact, the movements of this great pioneer missionary, the eminent messenger of God, possess freshness and rare contemporary value. They are studied with more widespread interest in this far removed present-age than the mighty global military operations of recent years. This daring, dauntless, driving evangel, ever blazing new trails with the old faith became the unchallenged symbol of obedience, determination and perseverance.

The farewell accorded Barnabas and Paul by the famous Antiochan church in Syria was simple, but solemn and sincere. Their departure was felt deeply by the saints there, yet they acceded willingly to the call of the Holy Spirit and assembled to bid farewell to this valorous vanguard of Christian missions. "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:3).

The first Christian missionary journey had begun. Where it would lead and how it would end were not of material concern to men who were being led by the Holy Ghost. Their first stopping point was Seleucia, one of the most northerly seaports on the Levant, and a prominent one. Their direction was westward. Thus, the gospel was beamed toward the lands of the western hemisphere, ultimately to give to those of us who were fortunate enough to be born in such territories the advantages which divine illumination always affords. It is hardly likely that much of a delay was occasioned at this embarkation port, for these travelers were in no wise particular about the kind of accommodations they received. Soon they were sailing the Mediterranean. THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Arriving at Salamis, on the easterly side of the isle of Cyprus, they began at once to preach the Word of God, frequenting the synagogues. Whether John Mark preceded or accompanied them to Cyprus is not clear, but he was in their company, making for the time, three sturdy witnesses bearing a faithful testimony to the natives.

They trekked the whole distance through the island, without incident, sowing the Good Seed as they went, and reached Paphos where Satan put up some noticeable resistance. There a vulgar magician tried strenuously to hinder Sergius Paulus, the wise proconsul of the country, in his desire to hear the gospel. When Paul "set his eyes upon him," he boldly exclaimed, "O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10).

Immediately upon receipt of this stunning rebuke, Elymas, the sorcerer, was stricken with blindness. Through it all, God honored His Word and the proconsul was wonderfully saved. John

Mark, refusing to go farther, returned to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas sailed north to Perga, thence over land to Antioch in Pisidia.

Their presence was usually soon discovered, but rarely had the door so readily opened for their ministry. On the Sabbath day, the Jews in one synagogue dispensed with their preliminary matters; and after the reading of the law and the prophets, sent for these visiting men, explaining, “If ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Acts 13:15).

Can the reader imagine Paul declining an opportunity such as that? With the utmost eloquence and accuracy, he refreshed their minds on points in sacred history, beginning at Moses, and delineating in rapid succession facts concerning the wilderness journey, the judges and the prophets. Each point in his discourse was a stepping stone to the glorious theme of his every presentation, that of Christ, his Saviour and Lord.

When he made reference to John the Baptist, it was then most opportune for him to introduce the wonderful One whom John called the Lamb of God. Then, he drove home the message of Christ, Israel’s rejected Messiah: “And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath” (Acts 13:42).

Thus, there was an amazing response to the gospel, with multitudes giving audience. Of course, it would be unusual if some Satanic opposition had not been registered. Envious Jews openly contradicted and blasphemed, so the men of God turned to the more receptive Gentiles. A revival began to sweep throughout the region, until religious and otherwise respectable women were stirred up, together with the civic leaders, and Barnabas and Paul were expelled from that general territory (Acts 13:50). They turned toward Iconium, not far distant to the southeast, totally unperturbed and undismayed; for, as they took their departure from the presence of the angered townsfolk, we read, “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 13:52).

A fruitful ministry was awaiting them at Iconium where they remained for an extended effort, with many conversions resulting among both the Jews and the Greeks. This gave them added courage to preach with boldness and God confirmed the Word of His grace by granting signs and wonders through them. Soon the devil’s divisive agents began to operate; but not until the Lord had given His co-labourers the hearts of many people, so much so, that the division showed an imposing number on the side of the disciples.

Increased pressure was brought to bear by the forces of evil, and plans were laid to assault and stone these inoffensive itinerants who were obliged to flee to the cities of Lyconia.

Not far to the south of Iconium, they entered a place called Lystra. Just inside the city gate, they espied a man with deformed feet who had not walked from birth. Paul perceived that this poor unfortunate individual had faith to be healed; so, shouting with a loud voice, apparently to attract the passerby, he commanded, “Stand upright on thy feet!” (Acts 14:10). The man joyfully leaped about the street. Of all his varied experiences, none ever matched what transpired here.

The extremes of unbelief may be both sad and amusing, for the people nearby began to exclaim with unrestrained excitement, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). Crowds began to assemble; and, as the erstwhile begging cripple continued leaping with rejoicing, the people rather unceremoniously would have crowned their visitors as gods, Barnabas inheriting

the title of Jupiter and Paul being honoured with Mercurius.

While some were thus engaged, others hastened for garlands, and still others for oxen in order to offer a sacrifice. When the disciples finally extricated themselves from the frenzied mobs, Paul disillusioned these would-be worshippers, saying, “Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God” (Acts 14:15).

In the meantime, the rabble Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed the missionaries. They soon changed the people’s coronating inclinations into a crucifying propensity, and Paul was stoned, dragged from the city, and thrown by the roadside for the vultures to consume. In all probability, it was through this experience that the Apostle was transported to the paradise of God (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). It is hardly to be wondered that the attackers left Paul for dead when the Apostle himself did not know whether or not he left the body; but what were a few stones with their ugly bruises when such an unspeakable compensation was his! If he ever forgot other points in his extensive journeys, Lystra remained indelibly upon his memory.

At Derbe, which was the farthest point in this first missionary tour, they met with little opposition, or else it was so minor in contrast to the Lystra experience that its omission from the record was warranted. They were very successful there, however, for they “taught many people.” The people had to be converted before they could be counseled. Then, to prove his indomitability, Paul returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia. What manner of man was this! Fear was utterly unknown to him on these excursions. He was not ill-advised to thus return for he went “confirming . . . the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). The progress which had been made was most gratifying to Paul and worth all the maltreatment. He and Barnabas ordained elders in “every church” and then commended them to the Lord (Acts 14:23).

Their return trip to the coast of Pamphylia was somewhat speeded; but instead of embarking at Perga, they swung to the southwest to present the gospel at Attalia in Lycia. Then they sailed back to Seleucia and returned to Antioch, the point from which they were sent by the Holy Spirit. The church at Antioch was soon assembled, and a complete recital of their experiences was rendered before an enthusiastic and appreciative audience.

Paul remained there a long time with the disciples, but it is questionable whether so intense a personality as he could be prevailed upon to take the rest he so much needed (Acts 14:28). THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul began his second history-making journey with a different partner, not so much by choice as by necessity. Paul had requested Barnabas to join him, but Barnabas insisted upon taking John Mark whom Paul was not disposed to invite, because he had turned back from the first tour when they had only gone as far as Pamphylia. The difference between them on this particular matter is described as being “sharp,” so Barnabas took John Mark and went to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas. This proved to be an extensive mission, and one that was most eventful.

Going by land from Antioch in Syria, the missionary party moved around the Gulf of Issus through Cilicia to Derbe, in all probability, passing through Tarsus, the place of Paul’s youthful years. At Derbe, Paul made the acquaintance of a young man by the name of Timothy who was to prove a great blessing to him in subsequent years. Throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia, they

evangelized with earnestness, bypassing Bithynia and Asia by Holy Spirit direction, and arrived at Troas on the Aegean Sea. It was at this coastal town that Paul received the oft-quoted “Macedonia call.” In a night vision, he heard a man appealing, “Come over into Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9).

The vision was so real and so compelling that they made a quick departure from Troas, going by ship to Neapolis and thence to Philippi. Philippi was one of the never-to-be-forgotten places in the memory of Paul. It was here that Lydia came to know the Lord Jesus as her Saviour, together with her whole household. This was a delightful experience. It was also here that a certain damsel, engaged in soothsaying followed Paul. In spite of her spiritual blindness, she gave a commendable definition of a true servant of God. She referred to Paul and Silas as the servants of the Most High God because “they show us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

It was through their dealing with this damsel that they were apprehended and ruthlessly imprisoned and secured in the stocks. At midnight, these men with uncrushable spirits engaged in a season of prayer and praise which brought forth the power of God to blast the prison doors and break the jailer’s heart. His cry, “What must I do to be saved?” has echoed down through the ages, but not more so than the concerted answer of the preaching prisoners, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

Continuing their course, they passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica where the Spirit of God performed a marvelous work through them. For three successive Sabbaths Paul reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews, “opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3).

Wherever the Spirit works, Satan is quick to counter. Some envious instigators of the opposition hired some vile, unprincipled men to cause an uproar in the town. This finally forced God’s ambassadors to move on to Berea where their hearts were deeply gladdened.

The Bereans received the message with readiness but took pains to ascertain the truth of the missionaries’ statements by Scriptural test. Even here, the enemy was on their trail, forcing the brethren of Berea to send Paul away secretly by sea, while Silas and Timothy remained.

When Paul arrived at Athens, he sent for his companions to make haste and join him. In the meantime, his heart was greatly exercised over the appalling and prevailing idolatry among the Gentiles who claimed so much in the way of culture and refinement. He disputed with the Jews and contended with the different philosophers. Dealing with the Jews, Paul could employ Israel’s antecedents-her history, sacrifices and prophecies; but coping with the Gentiles, saturated as they were with all kinds of superstitions, was a difficult procedure indeed. Some inquired, “What will this babbler say?” In language more in keeping with the day, this meant, “What has this vagrant seed-picker to air?”

Many were the tourists who entered Athens, attempting to build up an appeal on little or no basic authority. Paul, to many of these philosophers, was one such person, and they hardly raised an eyebrow in recognition of his presence. Others mocked. Nevertheless, the ministry here was not fruitless for the Word was preached and certain ones believed (Acts 17:34). Acts, chapter seventeen, gives to us a few highlights of Paul’s visit at Athens. To the Athenians, the Epicureans

and stoics were philosophers; to Paul, they were simply superstitious men (Acts 17:22). They were bitterly opposed to each other in principle, but sweetly agreeable in attacking the servant of God. In every age, those who cannot find any other common ground for agreement will join hands in opposition to Christ.

Titled persons had no intimidating effect upon Paul. He was fearless and bold in the Spirit. His message at Athens undermined every major premise of both the intemperate Epicureans and the haughty, egotistical stoics. With divine unction, he affirmed his belief in creation (Acts 17:24), providence (Acts 17:26), inspiration (Acts 17:28), resurrection (Acts 17:18), repentance (Acts 17:30) and judgment (Acts 17:31).

Concerning this Gospel, some denied (Acts 17:32); others deferred (Acts 17:32); but certain ones delighted (Acts 17:34). Thus, the two predominating practical schools of Athens lost many adherents. The Word wins in every contest.

Faulty philosophy falters when such facts are featured, and flattering philosophers are foiled by the weight of heaven's wisdom. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Colossians 2:8).

The Apostle moved on to Corinth where he made his home with some tentmakers. Being skilled himself in this craft, he worked with them, using every occasion to preach the gospel. He remained in Corinth eighteen months during which time he fellowshipped with such people as Aquila, Priscilla, Justus and Crispus.

Had it not been for the unconcern of Gallio, the deputy of Achaia, about the theological terms, Paul might have been detained at Corinth longer than he desired. However, he was free to continue his travels, so he sailed to Ephesus where his visit was very brief owing to his desire to reach Jerusalem in time to keep a feast. From Jerusalem, he returned to Antioch in Syria to make his report to the brethren. THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Paul's third journey was mainly a return to churches which had resulted from his previous visits. He travelled "over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). The word "strengthening" is a complete story in itself.

First of all, it was a great inspiration just to have so mighty a servant in their midst. Then, they had many questions to ask concerning matters pertaining to the faith and were waiting for further instruction in doctrine and advice in practical procedure. No one was so well qualified as Paul to help them in all these respects. The time he spent with each group was golden hours of spiritual fellowship and profit. They were strengthened in the Lord.

The high point of this third journey was unquestionably at Ephesus. Acts, chapter nineteen, suggests the following summary in these statements: The Ephesians reveled in culture, but refused Christ (Acts 19:35); and when Paul planted a pulpit in their city, there was no small stir (Acts 19:23). The craftsmen for mercenary reasons (Acts 19:25) were angered (Acts 19:28) and the religionists confused (Acts 19:29); but the town clerk contended that their precepts were incontrovertible (Acts 19:36). However, Paul spoke boldly, though not bluntly (Acts 19:8), and many believed (Acts 19:18).

While the devil was devising destruction (Acts 19:13), God was working wonders (Acts 19:11).

- His servant was persuading (Acts 19:8);

- His Spirit was pervading (Acts 19:6);

- His Word was prevailing (Acts 19:20).

When the uproar of the assembly subsided (Acts 20:1), sinners were still rampant in the city (Acts 20:3), but many saints were resting and rejoicing in the Saviour (Acts 20:17). The wonderful Word grew mightily (Acts 20:20) and accomplished what the Lord had intended (Isaiah 55:11).

Going from Ephesus, he passed through Macedonia into Greece where he spent three months in Corinth until the Jews conspired against him. Then he went back through Macedonia to Troas by way of Philippi.

During a seven-day stopover in Troas, Paul preached such a lengthy message that a young man by the name of Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, fell asleep and catapulted from the third loft, much to the distress of the disciples. The next day, Paul set out by foot for Assos where he joined his companions and sailed for Miletus, going by the way of Chios, Samos and Trogyllium. He wanted to visit with the Ephesian elders but found that there was not sufficient time to go to Ephesus and still reach Jerusalem in time for the day of Pentecost; therefore, he sent word for these elders to meet him at Miletus, which they were able to do. To these men, the Apostle delivered one of his most eminent addresses; and “when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship” (Acts 20:36-38).

The departure from Miletus started them back to the Levant; stopping briefly at Coos, Rhodes and Patara, they finally arrived at Tyre in Syria. Paul was twice warned against going to Jerusalem, once most dramatically; for a certain prophet from Judea named Agabus took Paul’s girdle and bound his hands and feet, saying, “Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle” (Acts 21:11).

Those in the company, who were noticeably emotional following this prophecy, evoked an immediate rebuke from Paul.

“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?” he queried, “for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

He could not be dissuaded. Hardly had he arrived until he was seized; and, but for the intervention of the Lord, he would have paid with his life for this journey.

When once we take into consideration the travelling difficulties of Paul’s day and the virgin territories through which he carried the gospel, we know of a surety that the Lord was with him and the ministering spirits hovered near in protecting grace. With such an example of dependence and determination, we should be challenged to launch out into a more daring ministry, trusting Him Who is able to deliver.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

01.18 Paul's Forceful Finalies

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN PAUL'S FORCEFUL FINALIES

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:10)

Authority issues in firm, faithful facts. There is no unsteadiness about truth. Out from the throne of divine power it flows with omniscient certainty, passing through chosen human channels, to fully furnish every earthly pilgrim. It is to one thirsting more than rivers of crystal water; to one hungering more than boundless stores of meat; to one fainting more than Niagaras of power; to one dying more than life itself. When all is dark, it brings light. When the perplexities of life freeze the gears of human reason, it is wisdom from above; and when the last dying ember of encouragement has faded into ashes of ignoble defeat, it is hope for the soul. Its illumination never diminishes in the light of common day, nor does its beauty lessen as the ages roll on.

Paul was a deputized deliverer of this weighty heavenly wisdom-an advocate of precious and potent revelations. He was not a plagiarist. He faithfully revealed the source of his authority (1 Corinthians 11:23). He was but the amanuensis to pen and the ambassador to present the designs and the desires, the claims and the counsels of his sovereign Lord. When he enunciated a prefatory "finally," it was not an intellectual, literary conclusion, nor yet a forensic emphasis. It did not necessarily denote the end of a series, the climax of an argument or the termination of an address. It was the keynote to a Spirit-inspired appeal.

Paul's plea for the propagation of Truth.

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:1). These pioneer "seed-sowers" were propelled in their onward course by the breath of prayer. The reinforcement they desired for each new offensive was not so much the presence of more soldiers in the field as it was for more suppliants at the throne. They knew whence came the power to cope with stubborn resistance. They recognized the value of earnest, loyal assistance in constant heavenly communion. Thus, the solicitation was submitted with solemn seriousness. It was directed to them of like experience in matters of grace-those who were acquainted with proper spiritual procedure, who looked upon prayer in the light of its incalculable importance and who were willing to reverently and regularly engage in its sacred exercise.

While personal prayer was sought, it was for an objective purpose. Paul's aim was to spread the Word of God as rapidly as possible and to expect results from its dissemination comparable to those so evident in the believers at Thessalonica. The rush against time was motivated by the great need for the gospel, and the expectation of results was based upon Paul's unshatterable faith in the virility of the Scriptures. He sowed, Apollos watered and God gave the increase.

The Word of Truth is extolled in men, not merely by reception, but principally through application. This is precisely what made the Thessalonian church so signally successful. Perhaps their prayers

would produce like success in other fields. It was this assurance which prompted Paul's appeal.

The Apostle emphasized two desires concerning his evangelistic endeavor: it must be rapid and evidential. In fact, these characteristics were prominent in his whole ministry. He was ever mindful that "the king's business requires haste." Delay could prove disastrous; souls were hanging in the balance.

The earlier he arrived at a given place, the sooner the populace heard about salvation; and the more rapid his advancement, the more communities could be reached. The Thessalonians could pray that the Pauline party might enjoy bodily strength, spiritual understanding, travelling mercies, open doors and ready reception. Since it was Paul's policy to "run so as to win," he had a pronounced longing to see evidences of fruitfulness-the Word being extolled in men and women. Hence, the Apostle's tender solicitude of the faithful saints at Thessalonica proves that prayer makes a potent contribution to evangelistic accomplishments.

Paul's plea for the preservation of unity.

"Finally, brethren . . . be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

This is a prescription which assures the maximum of spiritual blessing. It is a prescription with promise-"and the God of love and peace shall be with you." That is to say, when the conditions are met, God will somehow manifest His presence. How very necessary it becomes for God's people to know and to cultivate those conditions.

First, Paul urged the brethren to be perfect. An impossibility? No, not when we once grasp the essential truth. Imperfect humans may have perfect hearts toward God. Job was perfect by divine declaration and by human demonstration. He proved that his devotion to God was not dependent upon people, possessions or prosperity. His losses were both sudden and severe. In rapid succession, he was dispossessed of his cattle, his camels, his children, his home, his health and the help of his wife. Yet, through it all, he maintained steady confidence in the Almighty and firmly affirmed his determination to trust God though he were slain.

His own testimony is enlightening: "He hath stripped me of my glory . . . He hath destroyed me on every side and I am gone . . . young children despised me all my inward friends abhorred me . . . I know that my redeemer liveth . . . in my flesh shall I see God." Because he was perfect in heart toward God, God was with him and blessed him abundantly.

To be perfect would seem a sufficient stipulation. But had Paul merely said, "Henceforth, this is the order of the day for the brethren-Be ye perfect," his statement may have lacked clarity. They could well have queried, "Of what does this practical perfection consist?" Thus, it was not tautological when Paul, through the Spirit, enlarged upon the matter, extending it to a point of comprehensive completeness.

Being perfect toward God should result in personal satisfaction with the divine will, a unification of minds to comply with the divine purpose and a disposition of heart to live together amiably. Comfort, oneness of mind and peace are, subjectively, evident results of the very thing for which the Apostle was pressing.

Then, there is the objective desire-“the God of love and peace shall be with you.” How sorely the church militant needs the presence of Him whose love and peace furnish an invigorating and elevating atmosphere. For so long a time the work has bogged down due to the cluttering impedimenta of wood, hay and stubble, the product of careless unspirituality. For so long a time, also, the atmosphere has been kept tense and unwholesome by the introduction of personal temperaments-varied and sometimes vicious-into church activity. The presence of the Lord would prove a veritable breath from heaven-an air-conditioning to dissipate some of the foulness existent among believers. This is the stimulating experience which the beloved leader of the early church coveted for all true believers.

Paul’s plea for the pursuit of power.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (Ephesians 6:10).

Preparedness was more than an axiom with Paul. Facing life with its varying and inevitable vicissitudes bodes ill for the one who drifts aimlessly in the current of indifference. Nor can one, through self-determination, muster up sufficient stamina to fight the good fight of faith. Too much do we find ourselves in the throes of a modern asceticism or a technical determinism with fixed formulae utterly foreign to the divine way of life. No, there is no substitute for the power which His supreme might imparts. We must have it. Indeed, without it, we present all the sad abjection of Ephraim- worthless, weak, willful and wondering (Hosea 7:1-16).

This plea of Paul’s for the pursuit of power finds synonymous support in many New Testament passages. The young believers at Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea were plagued by the insurgence of a three-fold subversion; namely, Judaism, asceticism and Gnosticism.

The only successful antidote was strength to withstand, for malignancy cannot flourish in healthy tissue.

The Apostle prayed incessantly that they be “strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.” When he counseled Christians to “put on Christ,” to “stand and having done all to stand,” to “grow in grace,” to “be a good soldier of Jesus Christ,” he was encouraging a spiritual development which would put stronger servants in the field and more stable suppliants before the throne.

This is timely advice. With dehydrated and devitalized spiritual food robbing the body of Christ of needful health-giving elements and with swarms of parasitic cults and isms daily attacking, it is most essential that heed should be given at once to the Apostle’s plea to draw freely from that supreme might which endows the weak with strength and bulwarks against all insurgent foes. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds, and what is grace but implanted power? Regardless of the conditions to which one may be subjected, the inspiring words of our Lord have wonderworking contemporary value, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Paul’s flea for the purity of thought.

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Php 4:8).

Paul was not proposing psychic exercises or advancing a formula for mental hygiene. It is more basic than that. To captivate the thoughts approvingly is to cultivate character appropriately; for, “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.”

How important this is from the spiritual point of view. Words are thoughts expressed, but many thoughts do not issue in expression. Yet, the Lord knows even our thoughts. Some thoughts, if expressed, would humiliate others and embarrass ourselves, but does it not concern us that the altogether pure One knows them?

What are the thoughts of the Infinite? “I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” saith the Lord, “thoughts of peace and not of evil” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Suppose He did not think peace toward us? How sad is even the hypothesis. Then it would be evil; then it would be judgment. When the shipmaster on that notorious, Joppa-bound freighter discovered Jonah fast asleep in the lower hold, he cried with terrifying abruptness, “Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (Jonah 1:6).

Somehow, men want the Almighty to think upon them when cruel blasts of adversity threaten to destroy. They desire thoughts of love, thoughts of mercy, thoughts of grace, thoughts of helpfulness and hope. There should be more evident reciprocity. God desires us to think of Him. The Lord Jesus was pointed in asking, “What think ye of Christ?” If this be construed as a test of knowledge on the part of the disciples-a mere expression of opinion-what about the memorial our Lord instituted on the night of His extreme sorrow? Was it not to encourage His people to think of Him in His passion and propitiatory provision? “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

Mind is the sum total of our consciousness; thus, mental behavior is a psychological intricacy. Concepts, clear and confused, are constantly formed through thinking processes which are variously affected. Wrong training, perverted desires, diabolical encouragement-all produce questionable impressions. These issue in waywardness and folly. Hence, the Apostle urged that our thoughts be led captive unto Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The imagery is not that of wild and wiry steeds being driven into a corral. It is not that kind of a struggle. Rather does it consist of making Christ the object of our life and allowing His magnetic power to draw our thoughts to Him. It is letting the mind of Christ be in us.

But, as in all matters of practical importance, this subject is treated with interesting detail. The six things delineated in the text, i. e., truth, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness and good reputation, form a safe and substantial foundation upon which to establish our thoughts. In reality there are but two categories here. The first is truth; the second is purity.

Truth is the basis of orthodoxy. There is no straight thinking (orthos doxa) if the well-defined lines of truth are not adhered to carefully. When one thinks in terms of truth, it is obvious that there will be both honesty and justice in one’s conduct. However, it is necessary to advise purity as well.

Some things which are true may not necessarily be wholesome, whereas purity becomes the child of God. “The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalms 12:6).

If God's words are so pure, then His thoughts are pure. This is why He requests purity in our thinking. Just as thoughts of truth produce honesty and justice, even so do thoughts of purity result in personal loveliness and favorable reputation.

Surveying the whole field of mental activity, the Apostle waxed eloquent in his counsel: "Think on everything that is excellent and praiseworthy," he added. Here is elevation and worthwhileness. Stooping to the vernacular and engaging in common, ordinary, everyday street parlance is not comely. Loftiness alone becomes the one who is positionally seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

If we had an acute awareness of this fact and were we to practice the principles involved in this plea of Paul, surely we should be introduced to more gentle frames and sweeter temperaments. Not only this, but we should surely more definitely exalt Christ in our daily lives. Any procedure which points to so sacred an end should be diligently pursued and solemnly practiced. "Think on these things."

Paul's plea for the permanence of rejoicing.

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe" (Php 3:1). This faithful advisor admits that no endeavor is irksome to him which in any wise contributes to the well-being of others. He shares with the Apostle Peter the pedagogical principle of constantly reminding. What is worthwhile is worth learning well. Repetition, therefore, is profitable.

This fifth, forceful "finally" is, in many ways, the capstone of all Paul's similarly introduced counsel. If the saints are prevailing in prayer for the propagation of the Word; if they are enjoying the presence of the God of love and peace; if they are growing strong in the power which His supreme might imparts; if their minds are filled with truth and purity; then, what can hinder an exuberant spirit and an outflow of praise?

Thus, the Apostle knew well what he was recommending when he said, "rejoice in the Lord."

The kind of joy he had in mind was not superficial outbursts of hilarity.

- It was not an intermittent display of gladness.

- It was not a temperamental ray of sunshine which forces its way through when the clouds part for the moment.

- It was not the chorus of childish glee which ceases with suddenness at the stub of the toe.

- It was not the chant of a temporarily charmed beneficiary pitched in a minor key.

No, it was none of this. It was, rather, the sweet melody of the new song in the heart of one who has been brought out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay with feet set upon a rock and the goings established. It was the tuneful praise of an ever-appreciative soul for unfailing compassions, enduring love and abounding grace. It was the joy bells of the heart which peal forth clear notes of praise to a beneficent God in a continuous display of gratitude. He had in mind deep-seated gladness which will enjoy expression in spite of circumstances. For a personal example, the Beloved Apostle declared, "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmity that the power of Christ might be upon me." This is what he urged upon the Philippians and upon us.

What did he mean when he added, “For you it is safe.”

Rejoicing is a safeguard against discouragement both for ourselves and for those about us. One cannot become morose or melancholy who rejoices. Gladness dissipates despondency. It is noticeable to others and is reflected in them. It brightens the gloomiest atmosphere. “Sing and shout the clouds away; night will turn to day” is more than lyrical imagination. Then, too, rejoicing is a safeguard against the wiles of the wicked one. The devil soon discovers that a rejoicing saint is not very susceptible to his attacks. Rejoicing renders his strategy ineffective.

When the precepts of the Lord are obediently applied, the true, divinely designed spiritual status becomes the norm of Christian experience.

The main reason for the prefatory “finally” in the foregoing instructions of the Apostle is that there is no changeableness about these principles. They are fixed and effective-a workable formula for the Lord’s people in every age, backed by the integrity and power of Him who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

01.19 The Trellis Of Paul's Autobiography

CHAPTER NINETEEN THE TRELLIS OF PAUL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

"By the grace of God, I am what I am; and His grace

which was bestowed upon me was not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:10)

There is something intensely real about the life of Paul.

His rugged individuality and rare dauntlessness add a delightfully dramatic effect to his autobiography, be it ever so incomplete. More vivid than the augmenting strokes of the artist's brush, stronger than the accented syllables of the poet's pen, more penetrating than the clarion notes of the trumpet are the challenging revelations of his own positive, practical experience.

Paul was endowed with exceptional qualities, the kind which makes men champions in their particular spheres of influence. He was resolute but not vindictive, decisive but not impetuous, aggressive but not erratic, undaunted but never boastful. His actions betrayed more than balanced judgment, for his course was charted by omniscient wisdom; his ministry was fused with a power sublime.

It is well stated in expressive imagery that no one can increase his altitude without increasing his size; yet Paul was not scaling the ladder of success, rung by rung-he was pressing toward a mark, step by step. His aim was to know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Not a Utopian dream this. No, it was a vision glorious. It could be realized only by the decrease of self and the increase of Christ-something of a dispossession by preoccupation.

With one steady stroke of his pen he transferred all his pre-Christian gains to the loss column in the ledger of his life. Then, with the slate of his mind and heart cleared, he set himself with deep resolve to increase in the excellency of the knowledge of his Lord. If he were to be a winner, there could be but one worthwhile prize-"that I may win Christ!"

This aim became the habitual bent and tenor of his evermore exemplary life and earned for him the honour of being Christianity's most prominent apostle.

HIS DETERMINATION

"I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

This was more than a platform; it was an enunciated conviction, expressed with resoluteness. It was devoted attachment to a glorious cause. It was a position assumed through faith, one which proved soul-satisfying and heart-encouraging. It was a ministerial anchorage that defied dislodgement. When most public personalities would have feared losing prestige or would have hesitated because of likely criticism, he counted it the grandest moment of many a day to reveal his position.

Paul did not use the word determine as meaning “to mark out before hand,” but rather in the sense of arriving at a decision. He employed the same thought later when asserting, “but I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness” (2 Corinthians 2:1).

He was addressing an academically-minded people who employed their learning in ill-advised arguments against the purposes of God. They were more pedantic than prudent. To them the Apostle said more about wisdom than is found in any other given portion of the New Testament. He, too, had pondered and pursued the so-called wisdom of the world; but when the light of the glory of God flooded his soul, he was confronted with an issue. Was he called to be a philosopher? A psychiatrist? A literary genius? He stood at the crossroads of his life. Nor was the decision difficult. The Holy Spirit had already displayed life’s true values on the horizon of his renewed mind. Prominent, indeed, was the fact that “the world by its wisdom knew not God” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

There it was, clear, concise, convincing-irrefutable! How strange that one poignant sentence can swing the balance of mental power, subdue the emotions, submerge the aspirations and shape the life. What could he desire more than to have men know God? If a world of wisdom could not effect this end, then he must possess the means that could.

The decision was made-firmly and irrevocably made. The message of Christ was unquestionably sufficient.

It did not enter the Apostle’s mind that the day would come when one of his persuasion would be dubbed “a one-track mind” or “an insult to intelligence.” Nor would he have cared. This was his decision which suffered no violation in his entire Christian career nor brought him a single vestige of regret. To the unregenerate intelligentsia, he had sadly limited himself; but, on the contrary, it was undeniably an entrance into the unlimited, the unfathomable, the inexhaustible, the transcendent.

This self-imposed restriction never proved to be an handicap either among the academically-minded or among any others to whom the beloved Apostle ministered. Christ was the incomparable, exclusive means of life and liberty, happiness and hope, and the cross became the way from the old into the new for all who accepted it by faith. With such depth of wisdom and breadth of knowledge, Paul was never destitute of material either to exalt Christ or to expound the crucifixion. His proclamations were productive of the most amazing results. HIS DEMONSTRATION

There was an impressive symphony of characteristics which enriched the life of Paul. His demonstration was clearly in keeping with his determination for it was “of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). The word employed here (apodeixis) does not occur elsewhere in the Scriptures. It has no relation whatsoever to an ostentatious display of personal charm or acquired ability. It means expressly “a showing or pointing out.” It is used in the sense of his being a beacon light to point people to Christ.

Paul emphasized the features of two plausible types of ministry and used himself to illustrate the acceptable and fruitful kind. He could have majored in that school of homiletics which judges preaching by man’s oratorical ability and forensic eloquence, but he did not. “My speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom,” he explained. He chose rather, and

what a commendable choice it was, to be a “pointer out” of Christ.

“. . . in demonstration of the Spirit.”

What a multitude of holy impressions comes to the student with these words! It was not so much his demonstration as it was the Spirit’s. It was the Holy Spirit who was pointing out Christ through a transformed persecutor. The one who once breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1) now is breathed upon by the Spirit of God. The erstwhile troublemaker is now a trustworthy messenger.

All of this presupposes a yieldedness which is the primary prerequisite to usefulness in the field of Christian service. It demands a removal of cluttering impedimenta, a spirit of devotion and a vision of lost souls. Then the Spirit can work through a human agent to point out the sufficiency of Christ.

“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Then, too, the demonstration was of power.

No one would question the fact that there was a noticeable potency in the ministry of the Apostle that defied difficulties, challenged kings, opposed councils and wrought miracles. Was it human ingenuity, developed prowess or acquired ability? Let Paul answer for himself: “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Grace is implanted power. It is the wherewithal of divine provision that makes a deficient one proficient in an assignment for the Lord. It is the force of accomplishment and the productive factor of advancement in spiritual procedure. Paul was a general who believed in driving offensives, moving ever onward, as in a rush against time. He waged the fight for righteousness whether in an Areopagus or in a dark prison. Man’s philosophy could not prevent his preaching nor chains retard his challenge. His demonstration was of power, and that power was from God through the Holy Spirit. This was equipment indeed. HIS DECLARATION

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:1).

The main emphasis of Paul’s life was to make vocal the virile message of the good news which had so flooded his own soul. He walked amid a labyrinth of voices which enunciated doctrines widely diverse, but the gospel must neither be superseded nor suppressed. Indeed, it must be sounded forth, that, through the hearing, men might be saved. It was this same discerning one who enquired, “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14).

He purposed to be a herald of the truth, cost him what it may.

The need of a lost and dying world exerted an irrepressible urge upon his heart. He was forced to do something, and that something was well defined in the divine economy, for, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). As soon as this truth dawned upon the Apostle, he acknowledged the weight that settled with heaviness upon his soul. “. . . necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). The matter of declaring the good news is expressed in a most emphatic manner. The word “declare” has many meanings, such as to express, to explain, to speak, to make known, to

recount, to tell, to manifest, to lead through. At least ten different words are used to convey these meanings. However, the word Paul chose in 1 Corinthians 15:1 was employed by none other in the Scriptures, save Jesus Christ our Lord in John 17:26.

Paul used it once again in Colossians 4:7. With the word declare and its derivatives occurring so many times, this restricted use of the one form denotes special importance. The word itself (gnoridzo) means to express, but it is derived from another word (ginosko) which means to understand, to know, to feel, to resolve. It is clearly seen, then, that the preaching of the gospel by Paul was an expression of glad tidings propounded with conviction and through experiential knowledge. Festus, the governor of Judea, and King Agrippa were both affected by his forcefulness. The governor complained, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.” Without the least vindictiveness, this fearless preacher, though a prisoner, replied, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

Herein, we meet something of a challenge for homiletical persuasiveness.

Dubious statements are doubtfully received and insincerity fails to elicit interest. There must be knowledge and understanding, while conviction and resoluteness are equally indispensable. It is inferred that Paul preached to rescue the lost as a defence attorney pleads for the life of his client.

Wholehearted exuberance characterized him in his praise of the Lord and an obsessing pity moved him to tears as he sent out the message of hope to the perishing. He wept as he spoke of them (Php 3:18), but he was firm in his urgency as he spoke to them. Solemnly, he declared, “Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11). HIS DENUNCIATION The archenemy of God and man could not go unchallenged with so brave a general in the field as Paul. Whether incarnated in Goliath of the Philistines, or represented by Arba of the Anakims, or disguised under the garb of a Galatian preacher, the devil’s agents are vicious. Paul had to withstand vigorously the insurgent forces. Sometimes, this was accomplished by denunciation. Paul never hesitated to raise his voice in opposition to false teachers and their deception.

The clever inroads of legalism brought the wiry, little warrior to the defence of the Galatian believers. “. . . there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ; but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you-than, which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed!”

He knew how to register a stinging rebuke, when necessary, and always in the most unequivocal language. He does not impress us as one who delighted in conflict; yet he is never pictured as the kind of weakling who would retire sheepishly from a situation that needed his presence. He was not, subsequent to his conversion, a belligerent individual, but he was noted for his unmovable stand on the side of truth and righteousness. So impartial was he that principle prevailed regardless of friendship or association. The Holy Spirit records one instance when Paul withstood Peter to his face because “he was wrong.”

He expressed his disapprobation of all practices which could, by any chance, heap reproach upon the gospel. He warned against such matters as women improperly behaving in the church, irreverence at the Lord ’s Table, disobedience to parents, uncomely apparel, lack of respect for dignitaries, neglect of home responsibilities, unequal yokes and all kinds of immoral conduct. His code of ethics was epitomized in a letter to his missionary partner on the isle of Crete. “In all things

show thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine shewing gravity, sincerity."

Under the control of the Spirit, Paul unveils something of a sad picture of future conditions which seem to be having a fulfillment contemporary with our present day.

To Timothy, he wrote about those who are self-lovers, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, trucebreakers, incontinent, traitors, immoral, truth-blinded, empty professors of godliness. He wanted his son in the faith to look upon such multiplied sins as grossly dangerous. "From such turn away," he pleaded, explaining that those who find unrestrained affinity for such practices could only be "men of corrupt minds."

Paul's denunciation of false teachers and the progenitors of evil, together with their illicit wares, proves the pronounced hatred he held for the forces of unrighteousness. He was a true servant. He had assayed true spiritual values and he knew the worth of godly possessions.

He drew an unmistakable line of demarcation between law and grace and between truth and error. He strongly urged the Christian runner to throw off the weights of handicap and to renounce the sin that most largely hindered. He pointed out the futility of beating the air in profitless superficiality. Then, as an athletic coach giving final instructions to his team before the most important game on schedule, Paul urged, "So run as to win." HIS DEMEANOR The knowledge we have of an highly irate individual proceeding toward Damascus to apprehend Christian people for legal prosecution must not blind our eyes to the fact of Paul's moral background. His training in comportment and decorum had not been neglected.

He, himself, testified that "touching the righteousness of the law, [I was] blameless." He further contended that "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more."

He substantiated such a claim by a genealogical statement, revealing that he was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; religiously, a Pharisee. The tutoring he was accorded by the eminent Gamaliel added much in the way of culture and refinement along with the interpretive knowledge of the ancient Scriptures.

There came a day when he had to admit the truth of the revered prophet's contention that all our self-righteousnesses are as filthy rags. He met the thrice-holy One; and, in the blinding brilliance of His effulgent glory, the Pharisaical "good man" died, and Paul wrote his obituary, designating him "the chiefest of sinners." Coincident with the death of the Pharisee, a Christian was born. New desires, new aims, new motives came with the new life, and none the less than He Who is perfection personified became the plumbline for his behavior.

"The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God."

This was his holy standard.

The practical effect of Christianity upon Paul's everyday living was most evident. He reminded Timothy of this fact. "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience."

His past was hidden away in God by Christ Jesus and his future was secure in the most excellent glory. He made it plain that the Christian's manner of living is closely scrutinized. "Ye are our

epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men."

His daily living was highly exemplary. Approaching a serious matter at Corinth where disorders had become grievously apparent about the Lord 's Table, he prefaced his disciplinary comments by saying, "Be ye imitators of me even as I also am of Christ." This is entirely free of egotism. It is not the language of a proud boaster but the example of thorough dedication.

His daily behavior was also most encouraging. While we know something of the influence of one strong personality upon another, it would be difficult for us to comprehend fully the extent of his encouragement upon those of his day. Timothy, Titus, John Mark, Epaphras, Lydia, together with many more, were not only turned heavenward by his faithful ministry but were also strengthened in the faith by his life. HIS DEPENDENCY Of all the many immortal expressions which fell from the lips and pen of Paul, few excel in meaning the words of Php 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Native equipment, acquired capabilities, developed resourcefulness-these endowments and developments were all negligible without the supplied power of Christ. No one knew better than the Apostle the great need a human servant has of this promise of divine assistance. Nor did anyone realize more of its gracious bestowments than he. Whether bound in chains, remanded to prisons, lashed to the stake, wrecked on the sea, pelted with stones or plagued by a physical indisposition, the One Whose he was and Whom he served had assured, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

When Paul testified that he had strength for anything through Christ who gives him power, he had not only given us a clue to the basic reason for his successes, but he had revealed the secret of all his spiritual ennoblement as well as his enablement. He was in contact with the source of supply; and, in any hour of necessity, he could tap heaven's resources.

- This is why kings trembled and enemies quaked in his presence.

- This is what made him bold in presenting the claims of Christ.

- This is what supported him in ignominious and excruciating ordeals.

- This is why he could affirm, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself."

The manifold and complex experiences which befell him would have overwhelmed the average individual. Paul, however, was one who had learned to throw himself with reckless abandon upon an able Deliverer.

When Judah was being invaded by Moab, Jehoshaphat was at his wit's end and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were faint with fear. In the most crucial moment, the Lord moved to allay their fears by sending Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, with a message of comfort. "Thus saith the Lord unto you, be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Paul had heard that same counsel. That is why he was not vindictive under criticism nor fearful under attack. It was never his battle, but God's. On Him, he leaned for repose; on Him, he depended for strength. When it was God's battle, God would win and Paul would enjoy the victory.

Dependency is a spiritual relaxation;

- It is a trustfulness that never fears the outcome.

- It is a state of being which is possible for all, but possessed by few.

- It is a kind of self-emptying, an exinanition that permits a divine influx to banish fear, to control action and to accomplish ends otherwise impossible.

“I can do all things through Christ.”

This is one way of saying that the Lord has the power for the accomplishment of His every commission; and when the servant relies upon Him, the commission is fulfilled. Any task to which the Lord assigns man is too great for human strength, but He always supplies the needed means.

The “all things” of Paul’s occupation were, of course, the things of God’s appointment -matters within His revealed will. Otherwise, he could not have been confident of help. God does not furnish men through Christ who are not true to Christ. God’s Son becomes the channel of heaven’s provisions when men are “sanctified and meet for the Master’s use.” Complete and willing yieldedness brings the servant into this holy status and then he becomes fruitful. This was the life Paul lived which made him a veritable blessing to countless numbers. HIS DECEASE The earth, which is the scene of life’s drama, is not only the place of human beginnings, but it is equally the place of human conclusions. However pleasing a situation, it must have a point of termination; however severe a sorrow, there must be a time of surcease; however interesting a book, it must have a closing chapter; however remarkable a life, it must have an earthly cessation.

Just so, Paul the aged, that grand old man of the early church, one day bade adieu to his fellow workers, and, like Abraham, turned his eyes toward a continuing city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. He announced his decease; for, through some intuitive means, he knew it was imminent. “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.”

- It was not a disaster, but a departure.

- He would be unclothed to be clothed upon.

- He would be absent from the body, but present with the Lord.

His colleagues had heard him declare earlier that that would be far, far better. He knew that when the earthly house of his tabernacle was dissolved, he would have a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Jacob, in announcing his decease, gathered his sons around him. It was a farewell with the family present-a time of solemn sacredness as the faint voice of an aged father quietly recited a few final words. Paul made his announcement under different conditions. He informed Timothy that Luke only was with him. Tychicus was sent to Ephesus, Titus had gone to Dalmatia, Crescens had moved on to Galatia and Demas had forsaken Paul for the allurement of the world.

The declining Apostle, worn by many a battle, felt the end of his career was imminent, and asked Timothy to hurry to his side, bringing Mark who had been such a profitable assistant in the

ministry.

The announcement of his decease, one of the most notable extant, embodies three distinct considerations.

(1) He emphasized his readiness.

Few people can declare themselves ready to meet the Lord. Think of what it involves. To be ready to stand in His presence presupposes a completed task, constant obedience and fruit for His glory. It means that one knows whom he hath believed and is persuaded that He is able to keep that which is committed unto Him against that day. It signifies that one has remained unspotted from the world. It denotes confidence that the work done can stand the test of fire which will try every man's work of what sort it is. It indicates that one can rightfully expect the Lord of Glory to say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

While all of this was true with the Apostle, the tense of the verb reads, "For I am already being offered." This is most suggestive. Paul exercised the utmost care lest, while he preached to others, he, himself, might be disapproved. He urged the believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice. He must do likewise. Thus, he bore in his body throughout his ministry, the marks (stigmata) of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 6:17).

Now, the climax approaches and the offering of himself would be fulfilled; he would lay down his life amid all the ignominy Satan could impose. It was all for Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us. To Paul, the offering was pitifully small, yet he had but one life to give.

(2) He indulged in a moment of serious reflection.

"I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith."

Perhaps the consciousness of death's approach would hurriedly send the thoughts of any man back across the course he pursued through life's little day. How many could be so justifiably satisfied? Paul had waged a good warfare. He who urged Timothy to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ was a veteran of many battles at the time. He never feared the conflict because of his confidence in the Captain of his salvation. Paul was a finisher; never a quitter.

The main reason, statedly, that he did not allow the vicissitudes of life to be a disturbing hindrance was due to his desire for a joyful conclusion of his calling-a fight well-fought and a course completely negotiated. However, the deepest consolation by far was the heart assurance that he had, all the way and in every conflict, held unswervingly to the faith once delivered unto the saints.

(3) This dear old favorite of most of us also anticipated his reward.

That was much in keeping with the Lord's desire. Moses, we are told, gave respect unto the recompense of reward. It was as a challenge to spur God's servants on in faithful obedience to His Word and His will. Yet, note what it was that filled Paul's mind with such sweet contemplation. It was not the crown of a martyr nor the prize of a soulwinner. Surely, he would receive these from the nail-scarred hand of his Saviour. That he died as a martyr is not denied. Non est mors, sed causa mortis quae martyrem facit. (It is not death, but the cause of the death which determines the martyr). And that he was a soulwinner is firmly established. His heart's abounding desire,

supported by earnest prayer to God, was for the salvation of sinners (Romans 10:1).

He saw multitudes turn to Christ. Otherwise, he could not have said, “I am pure from the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26).

Yet the crown he had in view was the same that all others saved by grace will receive. It is the ultimate of redemptive development, “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” Paul was not longing for compensation for what he had done. No, he sweetly contemplated the fullness of what Christ had done for him. That was a joyful expectation. He was positive of its fulfillment both for himself and for all who love the Lord’s appearing. It was his last will and testament, and how rich is our faith in the inheritance of such a testimony.

One, whose life has been so rich in transcendent qualities, exerts an urge upon appreciating folk to indulge in eulogizing. Were we thus to give ourselves, we should wittingly transgress one of the Apostle’s most sacred wishes.

He was great and greatly used. His record is without equal among the many who have trod the narrow pathway of Divine calling; but, in deference to his own desire, we shall think of his invaluable contributions as resulting from the presence of Christ in his life. It was the Lord who sought him, sent him, supported him, and, finally, summoned him. It was the Lord who made his faith immovable, his influence immeasurable, and his message immortal. But by what means of psychological inhibition could we refrain from being emotionally stirred by so great an example of exceptional dedication, obedience and sacrifice. Up to the very moment of his decease, not one vestige of self-esteem or self-aggrandizement is evident. “That in all things, He might have the preeminence,” was the guiding incentive in his life and in his death.

“How did he die, Marcus, Whom thou callst ‘That poor old Jew,’

As he knelt at the aqua solvae, The sport of the rabble crew?”

“How did he die, that Paulus, That man of hated race?

Why, like a soldier dying in battle, With sunshine on his face.

“He was old and worn and weary As we left the city gate;

But with each step, he seemed to grow Stronger and more elate.

“And as we passed from the city Along the Ostian road,

Men stopped and gazed and wondered; His face so strangely glowed.” As the dying sunset drapes yonder horizon with the glow of beauty and paints its exit on the canvas of the firmament in variegated grandeur, even so, this brightest luminary in the orbit of Christian profession has, in the ending of his constant journey toward the dawn of Eternal Day, left an afterglow that has embellished and blessed the lesser lights which have flickered down through the night of years.

As the hand of the Infinite held forth the martyr’s crown, the enemy was quick to strike the mortal blow. Yet, his was not the repose of death; it was the repose of rest-a time of surcease. Then and there, like the calm which follows the fierce thunders of a summer’s storm, there was sweet relief

from the constant groaning for the adoption, the redemption of the body. Now, he awaits with us the trumpet blast to signal that glorious meeting with the Lord in the air, when the graves relinquish their dead in Christ and earth releases its heavenly sojourners, and our human bodies will be transformed into the image of Him.

Then, that long-contemplated, triumphal presentation before the Father with exceeding joy will become the glad day of meeting and greeting for those who love His appearing. Until then, Paul rests and we trust.

We shall not imitate the Ephesian elders who once wept over his departure; but we ought, with the deepest resolve, to emulate his sterling example of faith, humility and perseverance. Then, we shall be “looking unto Jesus, the Author of faith.” Then, we shall be journeying heavenward with Paul.

~ end of book ~

Chapter 23

02.00.1 HOSEA, People Who Forgot GOD

HOSEA

People Who Forgot GOD

by S. Franklin Logsdon

"For Israel hath forgotten his maker." (Hosea 8:14)

"My people have forgotten me days without number." (Jeremiah 2:32)

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02.00.2 e-Sword Preface

Preface As an e-Sword user, and a resource creator, I always try to find quality works I believe will be beneficial to others in their studies. I hope this fits that description, and that all who use this module will find it to be a blessing. To Dr. David S. Thomason, Ed Sandlin, and Pamela Marshall, Thank You for all of your help in proofscanning, I couldn’t do it without you all. A special thanks to Virgil Butts from Baptist Bible Believers for providing the text. To see this book and many other wonderful Fundamental Christian works, check out his website. http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/ For more great e-Sword modules, visit http://doctordavet.com/index.html. Your Brother In Christ, Jason L. Briggs

02.00.3 Table Of Contents

Table Of Contents

01. The Divine Diagnosis (Intro to Hosea)

02. The Symbol of an Unfaithful Wife (Hosea 1:1-11)

03. The Strain Upon Divine Patience (Hosea 2:1-23)

04. The Interlude of Love (Hosea 3:1-5)

05. The Controversy of the Lord (Hosea 4:1-19)

06. The Day of Rebuke (Hosea 5:1-15)

07. The Horrible Discovery (Hosea 6:3-11)

08. The Heartlessness of the People (Hosea 7:1-16)

09. The Ultimate of Forgetfulness (Hosea 8:1-14)

10. The Superficial Joy of the People (Hosea 9:1-17)

11. The Vine That Withered (Hosea 10:1-15)

12. The Reminiscence of the LORD (Hosea 11:1-12)

13. The Balances of Deceit (Hosea 12:1-14)

14. The Epitaph of Self-Destruction (Hosea 13:1-16)

15. Prophetic Glimpses of Recovery

16. The Remedy and Ultimate Recovery (Hosea 14:1-9)

02.00.4 Introduction

INTRODUCTION

ONE IS THOROUGHLY CONVINCED in the study of Hosea that no one can charge the LORD with failure to warn and instruct.

What more can He say than to you He hath said?

To you who for refuge to JESUS have fled?

From the beginning, the people had divine commands. They also had the presence of the LORD in the Shekinah manifestation. GOD spoke through the fathers and by the prophets. He gave them a code of governing ethics and an imposing list of restricting statutes. They had moral standards of the highest order and ceremonial procedures with deep godly significance.

From Samuel to John the Baptizer, they were never without a faithful spokesman from the LORD. As long as they maintained even a faint regard for the divine instructions, the LORD, who is slow to anger, bore patiently with them. Yet the testimony of the people never became prominently strong. Indeed, there were times when it seemed the pulse of spiritual devotion had all but ceased. Hosea prophesied in such a period.

GOD's dealings with the people through Hosea may be tersely summarized in this anonymous outline:

I. DEMONSTRATION FOR CONVICTION (Hosea 1:1-11; Hosea 2:1-23; Hosea 3:1-5)

II. REVELATION FOR KNOWLEDGE (Hosea 4:1-19; Hosea 5:1-15; Hosea 6:1-11)

III. CORRECTION FOR OBEDIENCE (Hosea 7:1-16; Hosea 8:1-14; Hosea 9:1-17; Hosea 10:1-15)

IV. EDUCATION FOR DISCERNMENT (Hosea 11:1-12; Hosea 12:1-14; Hosea 13:1-16)

V. RESTORATION FOR TESTIMONY (Hosea 14:1-9)

Metaphorically, Ephraim [1] is sick - critically ill (Hosea 5:13). There is promise, however, of his healing (Hosea 14:4), and this volume views the patient being attended by the Great Physician in a matchless display of longsuffering. We note the recorded diagnosis, the case history, the prescribed remedy, the prophetic glimpses of recovery, and the ultimate restoration.

The reader is impressed with the historical value, the literary style and moral appeal of the book, to say nothing of the forensic persuasiveness of the prophet. But the matter of chief importance concerns the throbbing heart of JEHOVAH in calling back His covenant people who have forsaken Him for idols. It is a stirring revelation! It shows in a convincing and realistic manner the depths to which unbelief can plunge deceived hearts. And just as impressively, it proves both the greatness of divine love and the absolute necessity for divine chastening.

Hosea is to be studied prayerfully, sympathetically, and alertly, keeping in mind the practical significance of 1 Corinthians 10:11, that "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

[1] Symbolical of the ten northern tribes.

02.01 The Divine Diagnosis

CHAPTER ONE

THE DIVINE DIAGNOSIS THE BOOK OF HOSEA views the ancient people of GOD in a deplorable state of spiritual debility. They seemed totally unaware of their condition. Like physical malignancy, it crept unsuspectingly upon them as they swerved from the faith.

The official files of the Great Physician reveal in careful detail the weakening state of the people.

- In I and II Samuel they were careless

- In Kings, dissipating

- In Chronicles, anemic

- In Isaiah, critically ill

- In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, delirious

And throughout the minor prophets, limping invalids. The oft-repeated concern of JEHOVAH, together with His call for their return, was ill-regarded. Their bent toward idolatry turned their hearts from His tender entreaties, and propelled them into a precarious situation. We observe in this chapter the chief deficiencies from which they suffered.

THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

First, in what sense were the people destroyed?

Second, why did they lack knowledge when GOD’s words were said to be nigh unto them, even in their mouths?

One thing is evident. The people were not destroyed in the sense of being exterminated. They were not consumed because of the LORD’s unfailing compassions (Lamentations 3:22-23). They were living. JEHOVAH was dealing with them, desiring and calling for their return. But as a spiritual force they were destroyed. Their testimony was gone. Their influence for GOD had ceased. Instead of commanding the respect of the heathen, they compromised with them. Instead of turning them to the only true and living GOD, they were attracted to their lifeless idols.

The reason they lacked knowledge is not difficult to discover. They rejected it (Hosea 4:6). This does not necessarily mean that they deliberately thrust it aside. There is a more subtle procedure. They simply ignored it, apparently without realizing that this was a serious offense - contempt of high Heaven! Their lack of heavenly truth, with such truth everywhere available, was inexcusable.

THE LACK OF GROWTH

"For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer" (Hosea 4:16).

To expect growth of a people who lacked the vital essentials of growth would be, to say the least, a most disappointing outlook. One cannot grow in spiritual stature when one is destitute of the very essentials requisite to such a development. To stand still would be a state of stagnancy, and stagnancy is death. Where there is life, there is movement. The very terminology of the Scriptures describes this movement as either forward or backward. Israel was found sliding back.

The figure of a heifer is tellingly descriptive. Has the reader ever witnessed the unpredictable antics of a calf?

Its erratic moves and sporadic plunges have provoked many an outburst of laughter. But when it comes to a chosen people with whom the infinite GOD has entered into covenant, and to whom He has given a special commission, and of whom He requires a holy conduct, it is far from humorous. When their behavior is of a hapless, careless nature, Heaven languishes rather than laughs. Divine disapprobation is at once indicated. It is unspeakably sad when such a favored people begin to falter. Sadder still when they persist in a divergent course. Israel went back.

THE LACK OF DEDICATION

"Ephraim is joined to idols" (Hosea 4:17).

The joining complex had an early beginning. When those who are joined to the LORD deliberately divert their course, they develop a propensity to attach themselves and their affections to some other object.

"Hear, O Israel . . . thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) was the strong appeal which JEHOVAH had made to the people who were called by His name. This left no room for idols. But, revolting against the Most High, they reverted to the most lowly. This is ever the, case. The room denied the LORD in human hearts will soon be invaded by idols. The influx is always rapid. As every backslider knows, they are difficult tenants to evict.

Hearts that are captured by idols are not easily recaptured for the LORD. "Let him alone" (Hosea 4:17) is the scriptural counsel, thus indicating how futile are purely human devices to retrieve the wayward. Perhaps one would not spar with Satan if one really knew how tenaciously he can affix his grip. Yet Ephraim was joined to idols.

THE LACK OF SATISFACTION

"Their drink is sour" (Hosea 4:18).

This information comes from Him who knows the innermost thoughts of men (John 2:25). No one can attempt to drink of broken cisterns without being mocked. The way of the transgressor is always hard; yet, as spurs in the steed, rioting emotions propel people onward in a way that is not good.

The appetite for sweetness is universal. The quest for such satisfaction never ceases. The complaint of JEHOVAH against His people concerned the strong tendency of their appetites to lead them into realms of dissatisfaction, indeed into disappointment. Yet enlightened people in

every day will flout the admonitions of the LORD as they drift into sorrow with the drive of their uncurbed appetites. The man at the bar who seizes the glass of sparkling spirits, knowing full well the end to which it may lead, is not one whit worse in principle than the man who will deliberately close his eyes to divine instruction and follow his appetites into inevitable remorse.

Sweetness is preferred by man; it is provided by God.

But the man who rejects GOD's sweetness sooner or later tastes of satanic bitterness. The counsel of the LORD is sweet (Psalms 104:34). The words of the LORD are sweet (Psalms 119:103). The light of the LORD is sweet (Ecclesiastes 11:7).

The fruit of the LORD is sweet (Song of Solomon 2:3). The joy of the LORD is sweet. These are but a few sweet extracts a wayward one denies himself.

THE LACK OF DEVOTION

"They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God" (Hosea 5:4).

The omniscient One scrutinized the schedules of His people. He found Himself ruled out. He who should have filled their thoughts, occupied their hearts and motivated their endeavors, was subtly edged out of their lives. What a sinister thing this is! The force of the words "will not" would definitely indicate that this matter had been called to their attention repeatedly.

It further indicates persistent refusal to shape their activities so GOD might be honored in their conduct. No less than six times these people had been reminded of the fact that "I the Lord thy Lord am a jealous God." He desires and deserves all we are and have.

No excuse for withholding is legitimate. The prophet called for readjustments, but such reforms found no favor in their cluttered minds.

THE LACK OF HUMILITY

"The pride of Israel doth testify to his face" (Hosea 5:5).

Can imagery be more expressive? Unbelief spawns strange and unbecoming traits, and haughtiness is the most despicable. It is self in its worst display. Submission to the Lordship of Deity then becomes foreign to the thinking and absent from the actions. This was Israel. He made himself the master of his destiny, evolved a hybrid religion, consorted with pagans, became allied with Assyria and Egypt, and destroyed the foundation of his liberty and happiness.

Pride was reflected in Israel's countenance, but it proved to be a veneer soon to be dissipated. Pride generally goes before a fall. In this instance, it was the springboard to disaster. The foundation of a disregarded heritage began to crumble and the consciousness of JEHOVAH's presence departed. Yet, in spite of the multiplying portents on the horizon, they displayed no inclination to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. They appeared self-sufficient and acted independently of the LORD. No other course is so certain of failure.

THE LACK OF CONSIDERATION

"They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness" (Hosea 7:2)

JEHOVAH sadly asserted.

This is the deadening effect of persistent waywardness. They no longer had an ear for divine appeals. Hardness of heart had set in. the LORD continued to call for His people to return unto Him, but such calls met with only cold inattention. The prevalence of this attitude forced the LORD to lament: "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me . . . Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:2-3).

Such lamentations were repeated. "Hear, ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy," cried the prophet Micah. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?" (Micah 6:2-3). This is a striking evidence of divine grief occasioned by inconsideration.

THE LACK OF SEPARATION

"They are all adulterers" (Hosea 7:4)

is the next observation, and one grossly serious, for the LORD had put a difference between Israel and the Egyptians (Exodus 11:7). He also made a distinction between the holy and the unholy (Leviticus 10:10), between the clean and the unclean (Leviticus 11:47).

In the days of Hosea, these distinctions were lost sight of; the line of demarcation was utterly ignored; and the people operated according to their own desires.

The prophet Amos gives us something of JEHOVAH's reaction in this regard: "Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble . . . ?" (Amos 8:6-7).

In a further description of the northern kingdom's spiritual debility, the Scriptures state, "Ephraim is a cake not turned" (Hosea 7:8). A good mixer may be popular, but an unturned cake is not palatable. Under the designation of "Ephraim," the ten tribes were found to be weak and wandering. Ephraim is also termed "a silly dove without heart" (Hosea 7:11). How senseless and heartless is one who, being blessed with all spiritual blessings; turns to compromise with the world and to complicity with evil!

Five times in Deuteronomy, the forebears of these backsliders were reminded that they were "an holy people unto the Lord." Now, it did not seem to matter to decadent Israel.

THE LACK OF EARNESTNESS

"They have not cried unto me with their heart" (Hosea 7:14).

Here is a revealing statement. Testimonies, confessions, even prayers, may have the ring of genuineness to fellow believers without eliciting the approbation of the LORD. "Come, and let us return unto the LORD" (Hosea 6:1) met with this divine retort: "They have not cried unto me with their heart."

JEHOVAH had witnessed with evident sorrow the rapid deterioration of sacred matters in that day. The people attempted to appease their seared consciences in a form of worship. In so doing, they transgressed His covenant and trespassed against His law (Hosea 8:1). Counting their procedure as purposeless, unauthorized and distasteful, the LORD was forced to ignore it in toto. He termed their oblations vain, their incense abominable, and their called assemblies iniquitous (Isaiah 1:13).

A stronger indictment against His people is nowhere discoverable.

THE SUMMATION OF THE CASE

"My people are bent to backsliding from me" (Hosea 11:7).

Their waywardness commenced with a tendency, continued with carelessness, and culminated in a habit. With the deliberate rejection of the Light, there was a proportionate increase of darkness. As witnessing declined, wickedness developed. When the curtain went down on the Old Testament period, the words of the people were "stout against... the Lord." They thought it vain to serve GOD and profitless to keep His ordinances (Malachi 3:13-14). It was clearly a case of chronic rebellion. Nor were spiritual conditions bettered during the dark inter-testament period.

When the curtain was raised again on the stage of GOD’s revealed dealings, we find a people who had no room for their MESSIAH, hated intensely His message, conspired frequently to destroy Him, perjured their testimony against Him, cried concertedly for His death, and finally had Him nailed to a Roman cross.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

02.02 The Symbol Of An Unfaithful Wife

CHAPTER TWO

THE SYMBOL OF AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE (Hosea 1:1-11)

THE FIRST CHAPTER of the book opens with a clear ring of authority. It was definitely the word of the LORD which came to the prophet. It came to him, of course, that he might present it to the people. This supports the fact that GOD maintains the power and availability of His Word for all generations. He spoke through Moses to Israel; through Samuel to Saul; through Nathan to David; through Jeremiah to the people; through Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar; through John the Baptizer to Judaism. And in these "last days" GOD speaks to us through His Son.

The reason GOD desires to speak to men is threefold:

(1) To give warning: "Turn ye, turn ye... for why will ye die?"

(2) To give life: "the words... are spirit, and they are life."

(3) To give hope: "Because I live, ye shall live also."

He speaks to the sinner to look (Isaiah 45:22) to the sorrowing to come (Matthew 11:28), and to the indifferent to hear (Hebrews 3:7-8). But the thing so difficult to ponder, so impossible of comprehension, is that finite, needy, helpless men stop their ears to the voice of GOD.

The LORD speaks with miraculous force (Genesis 1:3), with promising assurance (John 14:3), with comforting bliss (Isaiah 51:12), and with resurrection power (John 5:28). He speaks amid the labyrinth of voices. Yet for all of this, the majority of people will live and die without having heard His message of love and compassion.

Hosea was a spokesman for the LORD in perilous times, and his ministry reflects in a dramatic manner the Herculean task of getting a hearing for divine revelation in declining days. Isaiah, for instance, was driven almost to distraction (Isaiah 64:1-8). Jeremiah wept, preferring instead of the ministry to operate a lodging house for wayfaring men (Jeremiah 9:2). And Ezekiel met with opposition described as the piercing of thorns and briers, even the sting of scorpions (Ezekiel 2:6).

The ministry of Hosea continued for more than sixty years. While his contemporaries were pleading, respectively, for people in Israel to "prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12), and for the people of Judah to "come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18), Hosea was revealing the pathetic spiritual plight of the people as the omniscient GOD viewed it. His metaphorical style, such as calves, cakes, cornfloor, etc., should not conceal but rather clarify the meaning of his timely message.

Hosea 1:1 indicates the time of this prophecy. It was given during "the days Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, king of Israel." Verse 2 (Hosea 1:2) reveals the demonstrative manner in which the message was begun. The

prophet was commanded to take unto himself a wife from among the indifferent and backsliding people of GOD. This was designed to be symbolical of the union of JEHOVAH with His covenant people, now idolatrous and wayward. It was emblematic of what grace and mercy must do in bringing back faithless rebels to the place of devotion. It is illuminating to note here that Hosea means "salvation, help, deliverance, GOD is help."

In due course, and in unquestioning obedience, Hosea took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim to be his wife (Hosea 1:3). And as Israel, after her marriage contract with JEHOVAH on Mount Sinai, lapsed into spiritual fornication, it is assumed, in order to complete the figure, that Gomer, following the trend of the times, fell into adultery.

To Hosea and Gomer were born two sons and a daughter. Around their names, divinely given, the sad facts of this prophecy gather. The first son was called Jezreel (Hosea 1:4). The name, meaning in this instance "GOD will scatter," has an involved historical and spiritual association. Jezreel was the royal city of the wicked king Ahab, and became the scene of bloody murder inflicted by Jehu.

It was more than a hundred years prior to this that Elijah the prophet came upon Ahab (1 Kings 21:20-21).

The king called the prophet an enemy, and the prophet was quick to remind the king that he had outdone all others in his wicked perpetrations, and that his posterity would be cut off. The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in 2 Kings 10:1-36.

Jehu sent letters to the rulers and to the elders at Jezreel in a clever move to apprehend the sons of Ahab.

These rulers and elders were paralyzed with fear, and readily replied: "We are thy servants, and will do all that thou shalt bid us" (2 Kings 10:5). Soon the hideous instructions were issued and carried out. The seventy sons of the king were slain and their heads, carried in baskets, were dumped in two heaps at the gates of the city. Then Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab.

It is to this gruesome tragedy that the LORD refers when, through Hosea, He says: "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu" (Hosea 1:4). GOD’s patience and forbearance never affect His justice. "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense . . . If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold of judgment, I will render vengeance" (Deuteronomy 32:35; Deuteronomy 32:41).

The vengeance of the LORD has a very noticeable emphasis in the Scriptures. With a jealous eye upon His ancient people, He says, "I will... curse him that curseth thee" (Genesis 12:3). This will find its ultimate fulfillment when the hooks are put into the jaws of the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal (Ezekiel 39:3-4), and when the Old Dragon, who for so long had plagued the woman (Israel) that gave birth to the man child (CHRIST), is cast into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:3). The intermittent imprecatory pleadings, especially in the Psalms, prove that these ancient people understood that JEHOVAH meant to intervene in their behalf.

The avenging spoken of by Hosea is to take place "yet a little while" (Hosea 1:4), and "at that day" (Hosea 1:5).

The scene is localized as the "valley of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:5), later called the "plain of Esdraelon," extending ten miles in breadth, and in length from Jordan to the Mediterranean near Mount Carmel - the great battlefield of Palestine.

The prophecy of Amos furnishes light on this matter: "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:1-2).

"Therefore thus saith the LORD God; An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled" (Amos 3:11).

This seems to correlate with the thought of Hosea 1:5 : "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel," a destruction of prowess or strength (cf. Jeremiah 49:35). Whatever the judgment meted out to the enemies of the people of GOD, the wickedness of the people themselves is remembered (Hosea 7:2), and "the time of Jacob’s trouble" is inevitable (Jeremiah 30:7).

The second child born of Gomer was named Loruhamah (Hosea 1:6), meaning "unpitied"; more freely, not an object of mercy or gracious favor. Herein the people are pictured as in a state of broken fellowship. This finds an analogy in the Church Age as recorded in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness; CHRIST has no concord with Belial; the believer has nothing in common with an infidel; nor has the temple of GOD any agreement with idols.

Unless unequal yokes are broken; until ungodly alliances are renounced, GOD cannot maintain the fellowship of a FATHER, nor dispense His blessings as a benefactor. Those who have fallen into such unholy situations are commanded unequivocally to "come out from among them, and be ye separate." Then GOD says, I "will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." The thought is comprehended in 1 Samuel 2:30 : " . . . them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

The text makes clear (Hosea 1:7) that the northern kingdom was more wayward at the time than the southern kingdom; and, consequently, fell into the judgment of captivity the earlier. GOD gave Judah the advantage of Israel’s downfall for a warning, even as He gives to the Church warning in the examples of these former experiences: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Corinthians 10:11). But neither Judah nor the Church will profit much by examples.

GOD spared Judah without bow, sword, battle, cavalry, and cavalrymen; that is, without their resorting to warfare (Hosea 1:7). GOD stayed their enemies with His mighty power. But, when the flood of idolatry gradually rose to unprecedented heights, JEHOVAH confessed, "The land is full of adulterers" (Jeremiah 23:10), and "My people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32).

The graveness of the situation is summed up in the blasphemous attitude of the people later: "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we

plenty of victuals [food], and were well, and saw no evil [trial]" (Jeremiah 44:17).

When people maintain they fare better serving mammon than GOD, they have only to wait until the day of disillusionment and remorse. It will surely come. When GOD took His hand off Judah, neither their idolatrous queen of Heaven nor their armies proved sufficient (Jeremiah 52:8-11).

As soon as the daughter, Loruhamah, was weaned, Gomer conceived and bare another son whom GOD instructed them to name Loammi, meaning "not my people" (Hosea 1:9).

It is suggested that the first child, Jezreel, represents the dynasty of Jeroboam I and his successors, ending with Jehu’s shedding of blood.

Loruhamah (not pitied), the second child, being a daughter, represents the effeminate period which followed the overthrow of the first dynasty when Israel was at once abject and impious.

Then, the third child, Loammi (not my people), a son, is thought to represent the vigorous dynasty of Jeroboam II.

But in spite of the increased prosperity of this period there was no spiritual awakening, no perceptible return to the LORD. This prevailing broken fellowship with JEHOVAH left them still Loammi (not my people). GOD spoke to Judah in their prosperity, but they would not hearken (Jeremiah 22:21).

Tragedy is but a word until one is enveloped in its grip and tastes of its bitterness. Then adjectives fall short of description. Of the various kinds of tragedy, however, none can produce more unassuaged remorse than that which might have been avoided by attention to warning and obedience to instruction. The HOLY SPIRIT has marched out on the horizon of divine revelation some startling and sobering examples of defeated and dejected personalities (cf. 1 Samuel 15:26; 2 Kings 17:20).

At long last, after the display of patience most sublime, JEHOVAH rejected all the seed of Israel (2 Kings 17:20). Even divine toleration ceases, and with its cessation comes irreparable loss.

"Lo-ammi . . . ye are not my people," saith the LORD.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

02.03 The Strain Upon Divine Patience

CHAPTER THREE

THE STRAIN UPON DIVINE PATIENCE (Hosea 2:1-23)

IT IS CLEARLY EVIDENT that Hosea the prophet had a difficult assignment. He was not told in detail, as was Ezekiel, about the problems which would attend his important ministry. They were readily apparent. He had lived among the people and had witnessed their conduct. He was himself one of the people, and GOD called upon him to acknowledge filial and national relationship (Hosea 2:1-2). He was instructed to say to his brethren, "Ammi" (you are my people). And to his sisters, "Ruhamah" (I pity you). Then, in a universal manner, he was commanded: "Plead with your mother [the nation], plead!"

While JEHOVAH made it plain to the prophet that, since Israel's marriage vows had been broken through idolatry, He could not call them His wife, yet Hosea was to appeal to them, to minister to them as to his own kin. He was to have identically the same concern for them that Paul exhibited when he said: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to GOD for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1).

The prophet's ministry was to be energetic, intense! This is suggested both in the meaning of the word "say" (Hosea 2:1), and "plead" (Hosea 2:2). It is the same word that is used so effectively in Jeremiah 2:9, meaning "to grapple" or "to strive with," as when an officer of the law pleads from the hotel window with the would be suicide who stands precariously on the ledge. In an attempt to find a heart response, the officer raises questions about home, wife, children, etc. Likewise, GOD sought a heart response (Hosea 7:14).

Through Hosea, He appealed for an abandonment of their lustful escapades and a renunciation of their idolatry. "Her adulteries from between her breasts" (Hosea 2:2) means the longing within the breast - the outward reach of the affections - for things contrary to the divine will and way.

In the absence of a favorable response, the people must know from GOD's spokesman that they would run the danger of being stripped "naked . . . as in the day that she was born" (Hosea 2:3) - the equivalent of their condition while in Egyptian captivity when they had nothing to call their own. Or a return to the condition of their fathers in the wilderness when they wandered for forty years, a reverting to days such as when their forebears had to cry to Moses for water.

Then, the prophet was to stress the far-reaching effects of waywardness. He was to show how it imposes a handicap upon succeeding generations. To avert such a catastrophe, JEHOVAH cried out: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Now there is no alternative. the LORD must severely punish the nation. "Their mother [not only the leadership but the adult life] hath played the harlot," is the indicting revelation (Hosea 2:5). This

means that they practiced idolatry. "I will go after my lovers" was the national attitude. The Hebrew here indicates that it was a "settled determination" (cf. Jeremiah 44:17). And let us notice the blasphemy apparent in the latter part of verse 5 (Hosea 2:5). They had the audacity to state that their idols furnished their necessary provisions, thus robbing divine Providence of His glory. Such an attitude is inevitable of serious consequences.

The word "therefore" (Hosea 2:6) introduces the chastening which befell them.

First, their paths to superficial pleasure must be barricaded. To this end, the LORD said, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns." The "thorns" were not divinely provided, but were divinely permitted. To strengthen the pinions of faith and to deepen the devotion of heart toward Him, GOD has recorded many instances in His Word of allowed inducements. Job lost herds, property, loved ones, and health. Paul labored under a disturbing physical ailment for which he sought relief three times, then submitted willingly when he learned it was for his edification. Of what the thorns consisted in Hosea's day is not stated. The suggestion in the word itself would indicate disconcerting experiences.

Whether by loss of health or possessions, the diversionary interests of the people must be obscured - at least hindered. The words "hedge" and "wall," to say nothing of the term "she shall not find her paths," denote the effectiveness of the measure to be imposed. The first part of verse 7 (Hosea 2:7) strengthens this conclusion, for the people could not pursue their idolatrous endeavors.

The chastening was twofold: GOD cut them off from their idols; then cut off from them His provisions.

"Therefore" of verse 6 (Hosea 2:6) introduces us to the one phase of divine dealing; the "therefore" of verse 9 (Hosea 2:9) directs us to the second phase. The LORD must impress upon them the severe lesson that the reality of true blessing is not accorded those living in sin. Until the lesson is learned, GOD will withhold from them the corn and wine, the wool and flax. The corn speaks of their necessary food; the wine, the luxuries of life; the wool and flax, their clothing.

How sadly must the LORD have stated: "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil . . . silver and gold" (Hosea 2:8). Why did they not know? From a child, most of us were taught that "behind the bread, the flour and the mill; behind the mill, the grain, sunshine and rain, and the Father's will." Did He not make it clear that the gold and silver and the cattle on a thousand hills were His? But these ancient people did not know! They utterly lacked gratitude to the true Giver. Such unthankfulness is the forerunner of apostasy (Romans 1:21). They had denied the living GOD.

Instead of believing and acknowledging that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights," they chose in their blinded hearts to attribute their blessings to lifeless idols.

To read such a statement on paper, or to release such a statement from the lips, seems pathetic in the extreme; but to actually see such an attitude in the daily lives of people who draw their every breath from the hand of GOD (Job 12:10), as JEHOVAH saw them, is an astounding and a horrible thing indeed. Even the psalmist was deeply distressed at such an attitude when he said:

"Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law" (Psalms 119:53).

Lacking appreciation of the source of their blessings was sad enough, but that was not the full extent of their error. "They prepared [them] for Baal" (Hosea 2:8). That is to say, they used their God-given blessings in the furtherance of their idolatry.

It has been aptly stated that the Creator's provisions for man may be comprehended in three categorical designations: (1) a land - soil to produce; (2) a helpmeet - a companion at his side; and (3) beasts of burden - to serve him. Yet, according to the parable of the great supper (Luke 14:16-20), these very blessings keep people away from the LORD, all because they are not dedicated to Him. The excuses are (1) "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused." (2) "I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come." (3) "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused."

GOD said: "I will destroy her vines and her fig trees" (Hosea 2:12) which the people had attributed to the greatness and benevolence of their idol-gods. And, of course, the consequence was most severe, for their crop failures were of more than one season duration. They were to feel the sting of want, both of food and of clothing (Hosea 2:9-10). The term "in the sight of her lovers" does not here refer to idols, but rather to the ill-gotten associates in their illicit, idolatrous activities, for idols cannot see. Thus, Israel became a spectacle before those with whom they compromised. And GOD saw to it that these "lovers" (perhaps Assyrians) should not furnish aid to them in their impending predicament. "None shall deliver her out of mine hand" (Hosea 2:10).

The effectiveness of the divine method of imposing the chastisement is further seen in verse 11 (Hosea 2:11). The thorny hedge (Hosea 2:6), which was to be as a wall to break up their trafficking in idolatry and to cut off their depraved enjoyment in such things, actually resulted in the cessation of their "mirth" (Hosea 2:11). The word "mirth" means "delight," but includes the thought of "the object of their cheer."

The curtain must fall. They are to become dismal in their destitution. The water of their broken cisterns will fail. The blind alley of deception can lead them nowhere but to disillusionment and dismay. Their own stupidity will mock them in their remorse.

Nor will they find any soothing balm in worship. GOD says: "I will also cause . . . to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts" (Hosea 2:11). When the secular supports go, and one must fall back either on GOD or on nothing, it is rather instinctive for the heart to seek solace in worship. What would Ezra have done in the hour of his great perplexity if he could not have fallen upon his knees and spread out his hands unto the LORD at the evening sacrifice (Ezra 9:5)? What would David have done when his soul thirsted after the living GOD (Psalms 42:2)? But for these rebellious people, all opportunity of worship will be removed.

Lest there be any doubt as to why this judgment must fall with such severity upon Israel, the LORD clearly states that it is due to their worship of Baal (Hosea 2:13). They had burned incense to false gods and adorned themselves with earrings. They took this headlong plunge toward disaster by ignoring the true and living GOD. They "[forgot] me," JEHOVAH sorrowfully admits. Nor was this for a brief period. "My people have forgotten me days without number," the record states at a later date (Jeremiah 2:32). It was worse than if they had never known GOD, than knowing Him to apostatize from Him.

As the juvenile court is not primarily for the purpose of punishing recalcitrants, but to impress upon them the dangers of their wayward course, and to aid their rehabilitation, even so the purpose in view in the dealings of the Almighty with Israel was to show them their iniquities and to urge upon them a return to Himself. He waited patiently for their repentant hearts to cry: "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now" (Hosea 2:7).

~ end of chapter 3 ~

02.04 The Interlude Of Love

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTERLUDE OF LOVE (Hosea 3:1-5)

THIS IS BY FAR the briefest chapter of this prophetic book. In a sense, it is the most comprehensive. It is panoramic in its sweep, touching upon Israel's hideous past, her current dispersion, and her certain, glorious future.

The five verses which comprise the chapter are pregnant with deep significance. They constitute something of a summary of all the subject matter which has been treated before - something of a recapitulation of the appeals of JEHOVAH.

The chapter opens with an authentic note: "Then said the Lord unto me" (Hosea 3:1). It continues with a renewal of an earlier symbolism - an adulterous wife. It confirms, unmistakably, the analogy which the LORD was establishing between Hosea's wife and His own unfaithful people - "the children of Israel who look to other gods."

The chapter then emphasizes the wonderful truth of redemption - "So I bought her to me." It sketches the long period of destitution for the descendants of Jacob as the severe price of their rebellion against God - "the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice." etc. Then it envisions a brighter, better day, a day of restoration and blessedness - "the children of Israel [shall] return."

The woman whom Hosea is commanded to love is none other than Gomer, his lawfully wedded wife. GOD did not say, "Take a woman," but rather "Love a woman." She is undeserving of his love for she has been, and is yet, an adulteress. Described as "a woman beloved of her friend" (Hosea 3:1), it is apparent that there has been an alienation of affection. She has dishonored the family name, grieved her husband, and betrayed her children.

Her unchastity is an embarrassment and a stigma. But the LORD commanded Hosea to love her still. And how is he to love her who no longer merits his love? He is to love her "according to the love of the Lord" (Hosea 3:1).

This is the only effective way to love the unlovely. This is how a missionary loves the odious leper, the superstitious native, the savage, uncivilized people of the jungle.

This is how rescue mission attendants love the alcohol-saturated, vermin-infected wrecks of humanity which are gathered from the skid rows of the world. This is how children's workers love the little tots who require an affection that is kind and patient. This manner of love, with all other good and perfect gifts, is from above. It is in reality GOD loving through the believer.

What may be said concerning the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel? Much indeed! It is an exhaustless subject. His love abounded when He entered into covenant relationship with these people. Every choice He makes but magnifies His transcendent greatness, for "God hath

chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Thus, the Israelites did not come into divine favor because they were more numerous than the other races. Love is the answer (Deuteronomy 7:8). "When Israel was a child, then I loved him," is a very tender divine reminiscence (Hosea 11:1). That is to say, from the nation's infancy, GOD loved the people. He loved them in spite of their rebellion and waywardness (Hosea 3:1), and will love them forever, for His is an "everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

By implication, the LORD is saying to Hosea, "Your wife has turned her affections to others. I know your heart is grieved. However, this is precisely My own experience with the children of Israel, for they 'look to other gods, and love flagons of wine'" (Hosea 3:1). Of course, we need not rely on implication for the true reaction of the Almighty to the alienated hearts of His people. "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 3:20).

The looking "to other gods" (Hosea 3:1) speaks of diverted devotion; while their delight in "flagons of wine" describes their false and blasphemous worship - an utter denial and rejection of the divinely ordered ceremonial procedure.

The "flagons of wine" were pressed raisin cakes, customary elements in idol worship, the preparation of which involved the whole family. "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of Heaven" (Jeremiah 7:18). Yet GOD loves them still. O matchless heart of love!

The prophet might have said, "LORD, I cannot further tolerate Gomer. I have pleaded with her to amend her ways, if for no other reason, than for the sake of the family. The reports of her escapades embarrass me at every turn. Her persistent unfaithfulness has destroyed all the love I ever had for her." But, no, he moves to effect a reconciliation. He gets together fifteen pieces of silver and approximately sixteen bushels of barley to meet an immediate need in her case.

Many reason that, since fifteen pieces of silver were but half the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32), Gomer was all but worthless. This is profitless conjecture. Better that we suggest the full meaning is obscure. But since love is going to act - indeed is now acting - worthlessness of the one loved, in spite of her downfall, could scarcely fit the picture.

Doubtless Gomer's sin had gotten her into a deplorable situation, but even in such sad cases, when love begins to operate, the need is met freely and without misgiving. Love makes every attempt to recover the erring one from his predicament. The cost of doing so is never a measure of the worthiness or unworthiness. It is heart willingness to assist a loved one in need, regardless.

Who fixed the amount in this case is not revealed, nor are the circumstances which demanded the sum. Hosea met the need. This is the prominent and impressive fact at the moment.

The word "bought" in this connection is rarely used. It is said to be a special application of the Hebrew kawraw, conveying the idea of planning as implied in bargaining (Strong's Concordance). It means "to open" and "to prepare." This is precisely what love in the heart of the prophet has in view - to open the way and to prepare for better relationship.

The analogy of an unfaithful wife which runs throughout this book, and which is especially prominent in this chapter, continues in Hosea 3:3. As Gomer must wait for full restoration, so the children of Israel have a period of waiting before their restoration.

It is especially emphasized that, in the meantime, she must not involve herself in licentious matters. "Thou shalt not play the harlot," her husband warned (Hosea 3:3).

The period prophesied in verse 4 (Hosea 3:4) is described as one during which Israel would be without either civil polity or spiritual worship. She would also lack the accouterments of idolatrous engagements - the former by unspiritual choice; the latter, by divine restriction (cf. Hosea 2:6).

~ end of chapter 4 ~

02.05 The Controversy Of The Lord

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTROVERSY OF THE LORD (Hosea 4:1-19)

THE CHAPTER OPENS with the faithful prophet calling for the attention of the people. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel," he appealed, "the Lord hath a controversy [contention] with the inhabitants of the land." This introductory statement was an index into the type of message about to be delivered. It suggested a denunciatory presentation, the type which is neither pleasant to speak nor soothing to hear, especially by those who would be reminded thereby of their guilt.

Hosea sketched a gloomy picture of the dark clouds of apostasy as they settled upon the nation. He spoke of alarming conditions, of perilous times. He informed his people that GOD had found an utter absence of truth, mercy, and knowledge in the land (Hosea 4:1). A stronger indictment is scarcely conceivable. It summarizes the content of the chapter and is threefold:

They were without truth. Here, "truth" is not a moral attribute, but GOD's own precious Word. "Thy word is truth," JESUS prayed (John 17:17). These people were without it. They were without truth as most people are without it, not that it was not available, but because they rejected it (Hosea 4:6). There was a deepening hostility toward the word of the LORD, and the detailed evils listed in Hosea were the sad results. It has been aptly stated that the Bible will keep one from sin, or sin will keep one from the Bible. This adage was never more applicable than to these people.

They were without mercy. Toward men, mercy speaks of kindness; toward GOD, piety. They were deficient in both respects. It would seem, however, that the burden of the LORD's controversy with them concerned their lack of piety - their lack of fear toward Him. Few subjects in the Old Testament Scriptures are dealt with so prominently as the fear of Lord. "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Israel was destitute in this regard. "Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD" (Jeremiah 5:24).

They lacked the knowledge of GOD. This is not a repetition. It is the outcome of lacking truth and mercy. The word "knowledge" here is experiential, not theoretical. GOD was not in their lives. They acted in defiant independence of Him. As in the days of the Judges, each did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). This tendency continued until, through Jeremiah, the LORD was forced to state pointedly, "My people is foolish, they have not known me" (Jeremiah 4:22).

It is to be expected that, when "the godly man ceaseth... the faithful fail from among the children of men . . . The wicked walk on every side" (Psalms 12:1; Psalms 12:8). Thus the land of Israel was plagued by crumbling foundations (Psalms 11:3), and there was a rising tide of deplorable conditions - swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, and murder following murder (Hosea 4:2). Anguish and loss became the common lot of the people (Hosea 4:3), who were warned against laying the fault at the door of one another, for the people were generally guilty of striving as against the priest; that is, against spiritual leadership (Hosea 4:4). As a consequence, the fall of

the nation was the sorrowful foreboding of the prophet (Hosea 4:5).

The downfall of Israel is attributed to their willful rejection of the Word of the LORD (Hosea 4:6). It rendered them pathetic in their godlessness. In rejecting the truth of GOD, the spiritual soldier disarms himself of the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). The sojourner in this dark world robs himself of illumination (Psalms 119:105). The hungry denies himself essential food (Job 23:12), and the unwary divests himself of understanding (Psalms 119:130). Few people realize that the same Word which produces eternal life (1 Peter 1:23) also brings responsibility (2 Timothy 2:15), and will be our inescapable and unchangeable witness in judgment (John 12:48).

Israel simply ruled the Word of GOD out of their lives (Hosea 4:6).

The contributing factor in this utter disregard for divine revelation was their prosperity (Hosea 4:7). As their assets increased, their devotion decreased. This occasioned the LORD's decree: "Therefore will I change their glory [their accomplishments and acquirements] into shame [confusion, dishonor, reproach]."

Some commentators think the word "shame" has to do with idols. Some go so far as to identify the type of idol as the phallus. It is true the people had involved themselves in matters too revolting for comment, but this view does not seem tenable for the simple reason that the LORD Himself is the actor in the statement: "Therefore will I change their glory into shame." It was the glory of their increased possessions - their pride and joy - which was changed, changed for poverty, "for they shall eat, and not have enough," all because they would not "take heed to the Lord" (Hosea 4:10).

The deceitfulness of riches choked the Word of GOD (Matthew 13:22); the deceitfulness of sin hardened their hearts (Hebrews 3:13), then idolatry and dissipation ensued (Hosea 4:11). And in this sad spiritual debacle, the leadership collapsed utterly, the leaders being as guilty as those whom they purported to be leading. "Like people, like priest," is the report (Hosea 4:9). When blind leaders seek to lead the blind, they fall into the ditch together (Matthew 15:14). Judgment was promised for all alike.

The people were so involved in their idolatry, so bound by their false procedures, so confirmed in their waywardness, that they asked advice of their (stocks) wooden idols (Hosea 4:12). Their consciences were so seared; their minds so distorted; their hearts so corrupted that they placed confidence in false and hopeless means for deliverance from their precarious situation. "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me" (Isaiah 30:1).

What was the source of their counsel in the chapter before us? "Their staff [divining rod] declareth unto them" (Hosea 4:12). This is almost too difficult to believe, but when people turn a deaf ear to the voice of GOD they may turn in any false direction. This deafness became so general that eventually JEHOVAH raised the question, "To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken" (Jeremiah 6:10).

The general disposition toward idolatry reached the proportions of a fast-spreading epidemic. "The spirit of whoredoms" caused them to err (Hosea 4:12). Only the Spirit of GOD leads aright.

Their sacrilegious indulgences took place on mountain tops, on hills, and under trees (Hosea 4:13), and had a most degrading effect upon their wives and their daughters. These practices were wide-open avenues for Satan to enter and disrupt home life. It is only the flow of GOD's SPIRIT

which furnishes an atmosphere for spiritual edification in a family.

Of course, this condition did not develop suddenly.

Through their tolerance of wicked national and spiritual leaders it had gotten out of hand like a wind-swept forest fire in a period of drought. They either passively or actively condoned what GOD condemned. Even the otherwise commendable reformers by-passed the "high places." For instance, "Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD . . . But the high places were not taken away" (2 Kings 12:2-3). Azariah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord . . . save the high places were not removed" (2 Kings 15:3-4). Jotham "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord . . . Howbeit the high places were not removed" (2 Kings 15:34-35).

Hezekiah "removed the high places, and brake the images" (2 Kings 18:4), but Manasseh, his son, soon "built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal" (2 Kings 21:3). the LORD had but one explanation for this: "My people are bent to backsliding from me" (Hosea 11:7).

Judah, the southern kingdom, was not at this time in the best of spiritual health, but JEHOVAH expressed concern lest the northern kingdom contaminate the southern with its harlotry and whoredom (Hosea 4:15). If Israel desired to encourage spiritual adultery, Judah must not. As a precautionary measure, the people of Judah were warned against going to Gilgal and Bethaven (Hosea 4:15). These were centers of false worship. They were also warned about saying, in conjunction with idolatry, "the Lord liveth." That was the formula of oath appointed by GOD Himself. They were not to hold truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

Concerning the figure of "a backsliding heifer" (Hosea 4:16), Israel had not the slightest reason for casting off the yoke of JEHOVAH. His yoke is ever easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:30). It is the way of the transgressor which is difficult. Israel’s departure into idolatry (Hosea 4:17) was a most unpleasant sight before the LORD. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?" (Micah 6:3). There was but one thing to do in such a case of deliberate backsliding - "Let him alone" (Hosea 4:17). "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices" (Proverbs 1:31).

Nothing is so sure about a devious course (such as these people pursued) as failure, dissatisfaction, and ultimately disillusionment with its bitter remorse. Yet, Israel was carried away by the spirit of idolatry, only to be confounded by the emptiness of her false sacrifices (Hosea 4:19).

~ end of chapter 5 ~

02.06 The Day Of Rebuke

CHAPTER SIX

THE DAY OF REBUKE (Hosea 5:1-15)

THE DARKNESS DEEPENS. Nor are the Scriptures silent about the deadening effects thereof. Spiritual darkness dulls the conscience, dims vision, diminishes zeal, destroys testimony, delays decision, and defies the Infinite GOD. "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness" (Matthew 6:23). And when the light of testimony begins to flicker and fade, invariably the leadership is chargeable.

Thus the priests first are called to task. "Hear ye this, O priests," the LORD demands (Hosea 5:1). This accounts for the caution sounded forth in James 3:1 : "My brethren, be not many masters [leaders], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."

Unfaithfulness in leadership, encouraging thereby a decline of testimony among the people, is "spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Failure to hearken unto the divine entreaties resulted in such fearful degeneracy that the priesthood became poor, proud, and profligate, dishonoring the name of the LORD and corrupting His worship. "O priests, that despise my name . . . Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar . . ." (Malachi 1:6-7).

As Hiroshima and Nagasaki stand out in bold relief on the pages of history as monuments to the devastation of the atom bomb, even so Mizpah and Tabor are cited as symbolic of the wanton destruction of blatant idolatry (Hosea 5:1). And despite the fact that GOD had rebuked them (Hosea 5:2) for their unorthodoxy, the "revolters" (apostates) operated freely ("are profound to make slaughter"), corrupting the minds and perverting the hearts of the people.

Although the leadership is addressed in particular, the LORD also held the people accountable (Hosea 5:1). He had already pointed out that they were equally guilty "like people, like priest" (Hosea 4:9). They had deeply revolted, notwithstanding the many warnings placed before them. Leaders could not get very far with their nefarious false teaching if the people did not, passively or otherwise, subscribe to and support them in it. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jeremiah 5:31).

"I know Ephraim," the omniscient One declares, "and Israel is not hid from me" (Hosea 5:3). This expression, as to construction, is similar to "go . . . tell his disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:7).

The tribe of Ephraim was apparently the chief offender, though all Israel had become defiled (Hosea 5:3).

And what did the LORD know about the conduct of His people? Within the confines of eight verses (Hosea 5:4-11), He envisioned continued rebellion, pride, impenitence, deceit, danger, desolation, chastisement, and oppression - the multiplying signs of persistent waywardness.

The LORD knew that His people had no intention of altering their course, of rearranging their lives, of mending their ways (Hosea 5:4). They conducted themselves as those oblivious of holy standards. The spirit of idolatry was sweeping the emotions, overpowering the judgment, and leading the people in ill-advised channels as they expended their time, energy, and devotion in extraneous matters which could only blight their lives.

Verse 5 (Hosea 5:5) embodies a cause and effect relationship - the cause, "the pride of Israel"; the effect, "therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall . . . Judah also shall fall with them." The word "pride" has several meanings, such as arrogancy, haughtiness, excellency, majesty, etc. It is something which the LORD threatened to break (Leviticus 26:19); something He promised to mar (Jeremiah 13:9); something which "goeth . . . before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). In Zephaniah 2:10, "pride" is specifically said to be self-magnification. "I abhor the excellency [pride] of Jacob" is a forthright evidence of divine detestation (Amos 6:8).

There is in verse 6 (Hosea 5:6) a little glimmer of the effectiveness of the prophet’s warning. The people momentarily turn away from their "stocks" (wooden idols, Hosea 4:12) and hastily gather sheep and bullocks, presumably for the purpose of offering Levitical sacrifices, and they "seek the Lord." There is no indication of their willingness to renounce their idolatry, their spiritual licentiousness. Incomplete repentance is imperfect repentance - an empty gesture - and fails always to register favorably with the LORD. Thus, it follows that "he hath withdrawn himself from them" (Hosea 5:6). And this is the "day of rebuke" (Hosea 5:9).

The kinsman said in the days of Ruth: "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar [ruin, destroy, cast off] mine own inheritance" (Ruth 4:6). Here, of course, the LORD could do what He would with no danger of marring His own inheritance, for the unholy things which His people had espoused were not His. The things which had crowded into their lives were "strange children" (illegitimates) born of a treacherous wife - strange to her husband. They were apostates of the worst kind. Only the brief space of "a month" (Hosea 5:7) would elapse before punishment would overtake them in the loss of their portions (possessions).

The term "month" is usually connected with troublous times. The Ark of the Covenant was in the hands of the Philistines seven months (1 Samuel 6:1); the locusts tormented five months (Revelation 9:5); and Jerusalem was trodden under enemy feet for forty-two months (Revelation 11:2). These, of course, are periods of experiences; Hosea’s prophecy is the brief prelude to the commencement of judgment.

The alarm was to be sounded energetically by the use of the cornet and trumpet; the former was made of animals’ horns, the latter of metal in an elongated design.

There were not a few varieties of them. One type gave a clear note; another, sundered or quavering notes; another, clattered as of the slapping of the hands together; still another, a continuous sound.

The instrument used and the sound produced were always identifiable by the populace. The blast which announced the arrival of an enemy was as disturbing to their emotions as the sound of a siren announcing an air raid in the heart of London during World War II. And, in spite of their rushing with animals "to seek the Lord," the instruments must announce the inevitable at Gibeah, Ramath, and Bethaven in the northern kingdom, with a special need of concern for Benjamin in the

southern kingdom where an attack would most likely be made first.

"Among the tribes of Israel have I made known that which shall surely be" (Hosea 5:9), the prophet announces, not with any sense of pleasure, but with the personal consolation that he, as Paul in a later day, had "not shunned to declare . . . all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). And in no era can any people use the excuse that ample warning was not given from on high.

The extended warning which was given at a later period relative to the invasion by "noisome beasts" (Gentile nations, Ezekiel 14:15) emphasizes the mystery of GOD's patience. Beginning with Ezekiel 11:1-25 and continuing for 22 chapters the record states that warning upon warning was given concerning the coming of Nebuchadnezzar.

The alarm then swells into unmistakable seriousness: "Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head" (Ezekiel 33:4).

In Hosea's day the princes (leaders) of Judah were in GOD's sight as those that "remove the bound" - those who ignored boundary lines. GOD said: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbor's landmark" (Deuteronomy 19:14), but lines of demarcation meant little to them. Even though JEHOVAH was meticulously careful in pointing out, "that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel" (Exodus 11:7), they went widely afield in compromising with the heathen (goyim). They simply set all bounds aside and drifted whither they would. In view of this, the severity of the LORD is felt in His declaration: "Therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water" (Hosea 5:10).

The extent of this judgment cannot be comprehended, but something of its severity is revealed in the statement, "Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke" (Hosea 5:9). The manner of its imposition, together with added reasons for and results of its imposition, follows in rapid succession in the prophet's message to the people.

Since the verb tenses in this area are future, it would seem that verse 11 should read, "Ephraim will be oppressed." And what will the oppression be? The word itself is heavy with meaning. It denotes violent defrauding, a vicious kind of robbery, as, for instance, "The fruit of thy land, and all thy labors, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway" (Deuteronomy 28:33). And why should such ruthless defrauding befall them? Because Ephraim (the ten tribes) was "broken in judgment" (Hosea 5:11). This means they sinned against knowledge. Knowing to do good, but doing it not; recognizing the wrong, but indulging. A case in point is that "he willingly walked after the commandment" (Hosea 5:11).

It was Jeroboam who used his good offices to destroy the religious unity of the nation. "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them [the people], It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). This was the wicked commandment in view.

Now, approximately 200 years later, the people still blaspheme the Holy One of Israel by worshiping lifeless gods, attributing to them, with no apparent compunction of conscience, the deliverance of their forefathers from the slavedom of Egypt. GOD must at long last purge this idolatry from the land.

In the punishment to be imposed, the LORD, as the agent, represents Himself as a moth, a lion, and a young lion - the irresistible One. The impact of the chastening rod is felt in a famine of food (Hosea 4:10), in lack of clothing (the scarcity of garments coming about as though destroyed by a moth), and physical maladies described as "rottenness" (Hosea 5:12), or a worm in their bones.

As the devastating trials befall the people, the LORD says, "I will go and return to my place" (Hosea 5:15); that is, "I will withdraw My favor." Thus, the One who is "a very present help in trouble," under these conditions and with His own expressed intention must remove His comfort.

Out of His heart of love, and with a desire to avert such a sad end, the LORD inquires most sympathetically through Jeremiah, "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5). Simply this, they will go to false sources with no hope of receiving aid. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and [Judah] sent to King Jareb" (Hosea 5:13).

No healing was found. The weird crying at the "wailing wall" brings no consolation for the descendants of Jacob who failed to recognize the things which belonged to their peace (Luke 19:42).

This condition will continue "till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face," saith the LORD (Hosea 5:15). That time is still future.

Chapter 6, verse 1, is not an echo out of the past, but; rather a preview of the future - the dawning of a new vision, the cry of repentant hearts. "Come, and let us return unto the LORD," they will say. And the parable of the prodigal son makes clear that nothing so touches the heart of GOD as the return of the wayward. There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of GOD over one sinner who repents. In their cry, they will acknowledge that it was the LORD’s hand upon them in judgment during this extended era of suffering, and they are assured that the One who bruised them with the rod will bless them with His loving hand of grace (Hosea 6:1). Herein is observed the twofold character of the major theme of the minor prophets - the goodness and the severity of the LORD.

This bright spot on the horizon for the descendants of Jacob involves three "prophetic days." Revival will come after two "days," with restoration blessing the third "day." While it is more conjectural than conclusive, it is thought by some that the two days refer (1) to this present hour of their dispersion when GOD is out of covenant relationship with them; and (2) "the time of Jacob’s trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7), which will follow the rapture of the Church. Then, of course, (3) following such reasoning, would be the Millennium.

The viewpoint of the remnant, however, is right. If they are to know (experientially) this prophesied blessing and joy, it is a matter, first and always, of following the LORD (Hosea 5:3). There is no other gratifying, satisfying course in any age. What the LORD has prepared for them is just as sure as the rising of tomorrow morning’s sun (Hosea 5:3).

And what He has prepared for the Church is just as certain: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

02.07 The Horrible Discovery

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HORRIBLE DISCOVERY (Hosea 6:1-11)

JEHOVAH'S CONTROVERSY with His people lengthens. It is tempered only by His incomprehensible patience. In spite of the many heart appeals, multiplied by His undying love, the coldness of heart, impenitence of soul, and perverseness of mind continued to threaten Israel with a future of sorrows - a chastening which, by now, should seem to them an interminable punishment.

It is an established fact of the Scriptures that those "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Hebrews 12:6), and this chastening is the guardrail of protection against the disastrous chasms into which disobedience would catapult those who swerve from the faith. It is the hand of love which seeks to turn wandering feet back into the course of honor and obedience. It is correction for character and conduct.

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?" (Hosea 6:4). Should we permit ourselves to think that the Almighty had exhausted His ability to deal with His own people? Or do these questions of direct address but magnify the pathetic extent of rebellion on the part of the people? The latter, of course, is true.

But they would be hopeless incorrigibles indeed if parents could not detect some faint commendable quality in wayward children, although society at large may be ready to write them off as good-for-nothings. Even so, JEHOVAH sees a trace of something favorable in these people who seemingly have heaped every conceivable indignity upon Him. It is so faint, however, that it is termed "a morning cloud" and "the early dew" (Hosea 6:4), both unstable and quickly dissipated.

This, obviously, is why He had to deliver to them warnings of punishment (Hosea 6:5). Decadent days always call for challenge. This is the chief characteristic of the minor prophets, the burden of the major prophets, and the point of emphasis in the second epistles. GOD's people so readily lapse into such alarming complacency and indifference that all Heaven becomes solemnly disturbed. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?" (Micah 6:3). Such were the intermittent surges from the heart of GOD in Old Testament days.

"O Ephraim . . . O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?" As the warning continued, the prophets "hewed" them, and the LORD's words "slew" them. "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4). And why? "Thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth (disappears)," the LORD explains (Hosea 6:5). They had light, but walked in darkness; they knew the right, but practiced the wrong. "Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet" (Jeremiah 14:10).

All the while, there was a semblance of religious observances. With impenitent hearts, they brought offerings from their herds and flocks (Hosea 5:6) and feigned worship. Now they must be

reminded that this is not acceptable. What GOD does not authorize, He cannot approve. He "desired mercy [piety], and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). The word "mercy" in this verse is not the same word, found in Hosea 1:6-7, or the one used in Hosea 2:4; Hosea 2:23. It is rather the word translated "mercy" in Hosea 4:1; and, as we observed earlier, it means piety or reverence. They honored the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him (Isaiah 29:13).

The desire of the LORD in verse 6 (Hosea 6:6) is twofold and constitutes a double contrast. JEHOVAH desired reverential trust and "the knowledge of GOD." They produced sacrifices, but did not evidence piety. They brought burnt offerings but did not have the knowledge of GOD. The words of Paul furnish a fitting commentary: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God" (1 Corinthians 15:34). Those who are not awake to righteousness have no consciousness of the presence of GOD.

Their need therefore was practical, not theoretical; experiential, not intellectual. This does not imply that GOD overlooks or depreciates the intellectual faculties with which He has endowed us; but the LORD demands heart response, reality in the experience. So deeply had pretense penetrated their lives that they could disobey or ignore the unchangeable commands of the LORD as unprincipled men in the world break contracts with one another (Hosea 6:7). The LORD charged that this was treacherous dealing against Him on the part of His people.

As a consequence of transgressing the covenant (Hosea 6:7), Ramoth-gilead, once a city of refuge, now becomes a city of iniquity (Hosea 6:8) where violence flourishes to the point of bloodshed.

The spiritual leaders now come back into prominence in the text (Hosea 6:9) and are likened unto a band of highway robbers who lie in wait for their victims. Instead of being agents of blessing in Ramoth-gilead to lead men into safety, they collaborate ("the company of") as partners in crime ("murder in the way by consent") to destroy the spiritual testimony of the people. And how did this develop? Just as Aaron used his own hands to fashion the golden calf (Exodus 32:4), so the priests were the chief offenders in worshiping idols, "for they commit lewdness" (Hosea 6:9).

Words fail us utterly in attempting to capture in literary expression something of the grief which filled the heart of the LORD. "I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel," He sorrowfully reveals (Hosea 6:10). The virgin has become an (spiritual) adulteress. Ephraim has become joined to idols. If the moneychangers in the temple moved JESUS to register so firm a disapproval, what must have been the intensity of divine disapprobation in viewing the idols in the midst of His people?

Their leaders were broken in judgment (Hosea 5:11). Continued disobedience to the revealed will of GOD carries with it a compounding principle; as, for instance: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:5). The prophet sounds the same alarming note when he says: "Also, O Judah, he hath set a harvest (of judgments) for thee" (Hosea 6:11).

The southern kingdom may have been more conservative than the northern for a time (Hosea 1:7), but they had become increasingly contaminated with this rapidly expanding epidemic of idolatry.

Nothing is more certain in the Scriptures than that every deed will receive its just reward, but how graciously and patiently GOD sought to curb wayward tendencies and to invoke corrective measures among His ancient people!

~ end of chapter 7 ~

02.08 The Heartlessness Of The People

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HEARTLESSNESS OF THE PEOPLE (Hosea 7:1-16)

THE FREQUENT RECURRENCE of the same indicting statements will seem less repetitious if we keep in mind that Hosea presented them over a period of some sixty years. A series of messages, delivered orally once a month during the course of one year, then concentrated in written form, could not be read at one sitting with the same effect as when heard but once a month. It is not to be inferred, of course, that each of the fourteen chapters in the prophecy of Hosea constituted a complete message, and was given at one time, thus suggesting that the prophet only came to the people fourteen times in sixty years. In all probability, he was constantly fulfilling his office, moving from one place to the other, reasoning and pleading with them for a return to the LORD.

Two characteristics are prominent in Heaven-sent declarations:

First, they are always pertinent, and the message which Hosea delivered was exactly the type of message the people needed.

Second, repetition is necessary to register a lasting impression, especially when minds were so cluttered with extraneous things as were his hearers.

This is why the apostle Peter stated, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them [have heard them before], and be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

"When I [the LORD] would have healed Israel [all the tribes], then the iniquity of Ephraim [used in a more restricted sense] was discovered" (Hosea 7:1).

Ephraim may be thought of as the "black sheep of the family." Only eternity will disclose the near-victories, the near-successes, the near-revivals which might have been realized, yet were hindered by some unrenounced sin on the part of some, But Ephraim was not the only hindrance to returning prosperity in the land; Samaria is indictingly termed "the troop of robbers [which] spoileth without." In the former instance, it was sin of a concealed kind; in the latter, an open manifestation.

How shall we account for this pressing persistence along a devious course? Statedly, because "they consider not in their hearts that I [GOD] remember all their wickedness" (Hosea 7:2).

Some would have this read: "They did not think that evil conceived in the heart produces fruits seen by GOD." This could scarcely be the thought. All evil is conceived in the heart. Out of the heart are the issues of life. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he," The burden of the verse seems to be that they were not conscious that GOD held them accountable for the spiritual misdeeds which had filled their lives - deeds which called for repentance, confession and renunciation.

This truth does not seize upon Ephraim until the last chapter of the prophecy (Hosea 14:1-9), the fulfillment of which, in all probability, is yet future. A backslider cannot come back to the LORD on his own terms. One cannot go widely afield, trampling the blood of the Son of GOD under foot, grieving the HOLY SPIRIT, bringing reproach to the Gospel, then suddenly, although his heart be pricked with conviction, move into the back pew, sing lustily, give his offerings, and thereby reinstate himself with the LORD. It simply does not work that way.

Then, there is another sad angle to persistent backsliding. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). It is likewise easy for a backslider to exploit the patience of the LORD. Warnings had been issued for a long time, but judgment had not come. Because their licentious escapades with idolatry in the past did not result in some sorer judgment; because they had survived famine and enemy thrusts, they were not moved in contrition to bring words with them (Hosea 14:2) - words of confession (cf. Jeremiah 5:12). "The wicked [wayward] is snared in the work of his own hands" (Psalms 9:16).

But GOD did remember! Concerning their doings, He said, "They are before my face" (Hosea 7:2).

When we read that the iniquity of Ephraim "was discovered," we are not to believe that the LORD was suddenly surprised to detect the existence of such iniquity. Never! The omniscient GOD cannot be surprised, "for he knew what was in man" (John 2:25). The word "discovered" means literally, "to denude," "to strip," "to uncover." And while the LORD desired greatly to recover the people, to withdraw His chastening rod, to bless the land, the sins of Ephraim and Samaria, open to His view, prevented.

The prerequisites had long since been emphasized:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). They had sought His face, but this prevailing corruption in Ephraim and Samaria proved conclusively that they had not turned from their wicked ways.

While the LORD was observing with pronounced displeasure these condemning attitudes and actions of Ephraim and Samaria, the king (possibly Shallum) was viewing the same with pleasurable approval. "They make the king glad with their wickedness" (Hosea 7:3). The word "wickedness" denotes the divine appraisal, but neither the king nor the people looked upon these matters as being contrary to holy principles.

The hazardous plunge into idolatry which Aaron took with the people while Moses was on the mountain communing with JEHOVAH was due, he maintained, to the strong insistence of his followers. "For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us," was his worthless defense (Exodus 32:23).

However, here in Hosea there was neither seduction on the part of civil leadership nor coercion on the part of the people - simply mutual satisfaction of depraved hearts in their endorsement of ungodliness. Because of it, their land faced disaster.

The intensity of their burning lusts is likened unto a heated oven in which the baker, between the time of kneading the dough and its readiness for baking, stirs up a hot fire (Hosea 7:4). They

thought nothing of celebrations where bottles of wine were plentiful; where the king himself, sick (perhaps drunk) with overindulgence, would join with the riotous revelers in clinking the glasses as they exchanged toasts with confused minds and terribly corrupted hearts (Hosea 7:5).

After a night of sleep, the morning found their passions just as inflamed as the night before (Hosea 7:6); and as an overheated oven can burn up what is placed in it, so they devoured their judges and murdered their kings (Hosea 7:7).

Commenting on these hideous displays of uncontrolled passions, the LORD sadly recalled, "There is none among them that calleth unto me" (Hosea 7:7). When leadership was most needed, it was pitiful in its betrayal of the people. Instead of stemming the tide, the priests aided and abetted its progress.

In His case against Ephraim, the LORD termed him an unturned cake and a silly dove; the former touching upon his character, the latter his conduct. He was utterly devoid of depth and pathetically destitute of a sense of direction. The Pulpit Commentary, in suggesting that we take a good look at this cake, states: "It is burnt to a cinder on one side, and remains damp and doughy on the other. It is partly underdone, partly overdone; and thus, being neither dough nor bread, it is quite spoiled." This was Ephraim.

Then the figure changes to a silly dove (Hosea 7:11) - an apt descriptive. In a psalm of Asaph, the speaker confesses: "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee" (Psalms 73:22). While there is a similarity of condition, there is confession and correction with the psalmist; with Ephraim there is no such disposition.

"Envy slayeth the silly one" (Job 5:2). It is the result of deception, enticement or seduction, with envy being the bait which leads the victim into the trap. This is precisely how idolatry found its way into the lives of those who were chosen of GOD and warned by Him repeatedly against idols. They saw what the heathen had and they acquired a desire for the same. Deteriorating devotion to the true GOD opened the way for the influx of these strange things. Like a silly dove, Israel flew straight into the net.

In a day like ours reporters and analysts would wax profuse in their press stories of these developments. They would show how Israel, lying between Egypt and Assyria, two great rival empires, sought diplomatically to play one against the other by feigning friendship with both. It was political intrigue for national security. The LORD termed it a compromise of the first degree, for in their alliances they departed from the faith of their fathers.

They were "without heart" (Hosea 7:11), that is, without understanding of the true way.

Instead of saying, Our "help cometh from the Lord," they sought the assistance of their neighboring countries. When they did this, the LORD warned, "I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of [shot down from] the Heaven" (Hosea 7:12).

Their political negotiations were futile. Failure was inevitable, and consequences duly prophesied were to be severe. And the chief reason the "woe" is now pronounced with such austerity is that their rapid departure ("fled from me") demanded firm treatment (Hosea 7:13). Their actions, and now their words, had spoken lies against the Holy One of Israel who had redeemed them (Hosea 7:13).

The people of Hosea’s day "howled upon their beds" (Hosea 7:14) with anxiety and fear, yet the LORD disabuses our minds lest we accredit them with sincerity. "They have not cried unto me with their heart," He reveals (Hosea 7:14). That this was not the anguish of repentance is proved in the same verse where we see them gathering in idol temples to ask false gods for a harvest of grain and fruit; and, in so doing, they deliberately ignored the LORD.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9).

One of GOD’s choice servants in recent times was humble enough to confess: "I sin when I pray. I sin when I preach. When I repent, my repentance needs to be repented of. When I weep, every tear needs to be washed in the blood of the LAMB." At our best, we are all unprofitable servants. How despicable must be our case when we are not at our best! Then, how imponderable the situation when godly restraint is thrown to the wind, allowing wayward propensities to reach out freely where they will!

Yes, they cried, but they did not cry with their hearts. Perhaps we have thought of the heart only as pulsating or palpitating, not enunciating or articulating. Well, GOD waits for the heart to speak. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face"; David testified, "my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Psalms 27:8). This is the proper response - the only kind acceptable to the LORD.

The heart must speak! One day the descendants of Jacob will speak with their hearts. When they do the LORD will gladly and promptly speak to them in peace and prosperity. This is what He waits with long patience to do.

It is with a disappointing note that chapter 7 (Hosea 7:1-16) closes.

Even though JEHOVAH-GOD, time and again, had granted them victory over their enemies, they kept on devising and practicing idolatry (Hosea 7:15). Like a crooked bow, they could not strike the proper target (Hosea 7:16). No more can a warped testimony today appeal to the LORD or impress the lost. And, let us not forget it, as these ancient people, through rebellion against GOD, faced the derision in the land of Egypt where they sought for help, even so Christians need expect no greater esteem from the world with which they have compromised their testimony.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

02.09 The Ultimate Of Forgetfulness

CHAPTER NINE

THE ULTIMATE OF FORGETFULNESS (Hosea 8:1-14)

THE PLAGUE OF UNBELIEF continues. The provocations multiply; and, with their increase, the portents of judgment loom more ominously on the horizon. The pages of Israel's history are replete with exhibits of almost unbelievable cases of rebellion. The chapter before us adds unsightly strokes to the developing portraiture of their spiritual delinquency.

Transgression, sin and iniquity - three expressions for infractions of divine statutes - are mentioned twenty-four times in ten chapters, iniquity totaling fourteen in this number. Since iniquity speaks of corruption in the nature, or inward perversion, it is not difficult to understand why there was such bold transgression (rebellion against law) and evident sin (moral and spiritual failure) on the part of the people.

Sin distorts, diverts, degrades and destroys. We must admit that it fills our asylums, crams our workhouses, demoralizes our youth, blights the nation, breaks homes, spoils happiness and stocks the cemeteries.

Describing His people in an era of declension, JEHOVAH asserted: "Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good . . . they are altogether become filthy" (Psalms 53:1; Psalms 53:3). Under such circumstances, it seemed most fitting for the LORD to inquire, "Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" (Psalms 53:4). The thought would seem to be that those with knowledge could not possibly so behave. But these people in Hosea's day did have knowledge, and their flagrant disregard of it makes the case against them all the more serious.

Now the command is given to "set the trumpet to thy mouth" (Hosea 8:1), although it is not to be blown at once.

But, as a musical director raises his baton for the downbeat, so the trumpet is in readiness to sound the alarm. Then judgment will come with the swiftness of an eagle (Hosea 8:1) swooping down upon its prey with deadly aim. The provocation is summarized:

(1) "They have transgressed my covenant."

(2) They have "trespassed against my law" (Hosea 8:1).

The former concerned relationship; the latter, regulations. GOD set His love upon the people (Deuteronomy 7:7) long before He imposed legal obligations upon them. He was known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob only as the Almighty One - the omnipotent One who is able to deliver. Then, through Moses, He becomes known as JEHOVAH (Exodus 6:3), the covenant-keeping GOD who with inviolate righteousness and unaffected faithfulness shows mercy, keeps judgment and redeems.

Upon Him were these indignities being heaped. They transgressed the love-covenant, crossed over, got out of bounds, acted contrary to the solemn and sacred principles involved in it. They trespassed against GOD's law - the code designed to control conduct. The word "trespass" here means to act covertly or treacherously, that is with an utter disregard for the sanctity of and the binding responsibility involved in these authoritative directives.

This explains why the trumpet alarm was about to sound.

Israel's desperate reaction is hinted in the excited salutation of verse 2 (Hosea 8:2), "My God." When the foundations begin to crumble (Psalms 11:3), when the secular supports desert in the crisis, this is invariably the intuitive outburst. It is, therefore, not necessarily an indication of reverent address, the kind which is acceptable to the Most High GOD. the LORD JESUS CHRIST gives us a sobering corroboration: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22-23).

These ancient people made bold to assert, "We know thee" (Hosea 8:2). It was however, only a theoretical appreciation. It was intellectual, not experiential.

At a somewhat later date, the LORD put a lie to their empty profession.

Said He: "My people is foolish, they have not known me" (Jeremiah 4:22). Their words were nothing more than the attempt of a disobedient child to intercept the chastening rod.

There is convincing evidence that the people were destitute of discernment. For instance: "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good" (Hosea 8:3). It was not a process of quiet premeditation during which the relative merits of GOD's way and the way of the heathen were carefully weighed in order to arrive at a proper decision. No. They did not "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). They did not sit down to figure out the cost before they began building on the sand. GOD's way was ignored.

It came about through a subtle dispossession by preoccupation. The "thing that is good" was gradually replaced by the thing that was bad, and GOD was crowded out. Because of this the prophet was forceful in his warning that a wicked enemy would fast pursue on their heels (Hosea 8:3) to plague them.

What is a "cold war" or a "war of nerves" in comparison with the stark reality of a vicious attack by a ruthless enemy? Possessions stolen, houses burned, children tortured, women ravaged, the infirm beaten and killed - these inhumanities in variations of brutality being but the heel prints of an invading army.

Nothing is more depressive than the sight of a helpless populace making a desperate dash to escape such miseries, drawing along with them their little ones so incapable of comprehending the meaning of it all, laboriously bearing a few belongings with which to start anew somewhere, sometime - all the while wondering where, if any place, they will rest their weary bodies in the dismal night ahead. The trumpet is at the mouth. Its shrill blast may sound at any moment.

And where is the shelter in this storm? Where is the place of refuge? Where is the one who will be a present help in the day of trouble? "Israel hath cast off the thing that is good" (Hosea 8:3) for the thing that is not good. Now its worthlessness is to be proved. Shall their idols rise to the occasion?

No. "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off," they are informed in the midst of their frustration (Hosea 8:5). What a bitter fact to face! As a red herring can divert the scent to deceive the thoroughbred hound, even so the golden calf was the derail for Israel’s pitiful detour into idolatry.

"Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols," the LORD reminds (Hosea 8:4), for He had seen them turning the tithes which were rightly His into the treasury of idolatrous enterprises. Their indulgences now deal them a destructive blow. They themselves furnished the instrument which occasions the dilemma - "that they may be cut off" (Hosea 8:4).

It is further proved that spiritual disease does not localize itself in one area of the life, but pervades the whole economy.

- They were wrong in the field of worship.

- They were at fault as well in the sphere of politics. "They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not" (Hosea 8:4), is the divine revelation.

Disowning the LORD in their devotions, they disregarded Him in their actions. There was an utter collapse of the spiritual structure; and "where there is no vision [of GOD], the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). What they planned was without divine counsel (Proverbs 1:25); what they did was apart from divine authorization - "I knew it not" (Hosea 8:4), saith the LORD.

In the light of their deep involvements in unholy alliances and unspiritual procedure, a logical question is raised, whether by the LORD Himself or by the prophet: "How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?" (Hosea 8:5). That is to say, being bent upon backsliding as they were (Hosea 11:7), having invested so heavily of their gold and silver in idols (Hosea 8:4), having defied the infinite GOD in their politics, having rejected the commands of the LORD, having hardened their hearts against the prophet’s message, how long would it require for them to extricate themselves? How long before they would detach themselves from unrighteousness?

Since the word "innocency" means "clearness" or "cleanness," how long ere they will come clear or clean of this filthiness? Confession of guilt and renunciation of ungodly practices could quickly rectify the situation if they were willing and earnest, but they were not so inclined. In saying, "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone" (Hosea 4:17), the LORD was revealing how difficult it is to recapture those hearts which have been taken by idols.

While the people were JEHOVAH’s, their doings were not His. In verse 6 (Hosea 8:6), He lays the whole blame at Israel’s door for the present state of affairs, disclaims any attachment to it, and promises utter destruction of their idols.

"They have sown the wind, and [now] they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7). The gradual development of spiritual adultery may seem mild and harmless, but punishment for it is severe.

They had been adding the fuel but did not anticipate a conflagration. Waywardness allows little or no opportunity for thoughts of possible judgment.

Crop failure is mentioned once again. The corn will not grow sufficiently tall to have a stalk on which the ear can appear. The bud shall not fructify. And, perchance, there should be some produce, the marauding troops of invading armies will make quick riddance of it (Hosea 8:7).

"He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity" (Proverbs 22:8). Now, the prophetic camera is projected toward the inevitable - captivity. "Israel is swallowed up . . . among the Gentiles" (Hosea 8:8). The covenant people are viewed in captive hands, subdued, oppressed, detested. How charitable of the HOLY SPIRIT to speak of them as being to the Gentiles merely "as a vessel wherein is no pleasure" (Hosea 8:8) And of course this is true. At the same time, they were hated and despised, a thorn in the flesh of their conquerors. They were "swallowed up" but proved to be no more palatable to their captors than was Jonah to the "whale."

Desperate attempts were made to procure economic aid and military assistance from Assyria (Hosea 8:9), and this headstrong persistence is likened to a "wild ass" (Hosea 8:9). Where was their GOD? Why did they not appeal to Him? They were far from GOD in their manner of life, and their stiffneckedness (Exodus 33:5) was but the proof of their impenitence. They would not humble themselves; they would not renounce their sins. They preferred in their dire distress to solicit aid of their pagan neighbors.

"Alone by himself" (Hosea 8:9) is an apt characterization of Israel. "Lo, the people shall dwell alone" (Numbers 23:9). When did they have a nation to call their friend? Which nation today is willing to stand as a friend of the revived state of Israel? JEHOVAH was their friend, but they deserted Him. Then, as now, obedience was the shining pathway of friendship with the Almighty.

Examining further the false premises on which Israel sought in vain to build her welfare, the LORD states that "Ephraim hath hired lovers" (Hosea 8:9). This is arrogance rather than romance. There is no hint of the romantic in the immediate context. All is dark and gloomy. They were driven into a corner. With their backs to the wall they sought to buy friendship, to solicit the favor of the Gentiles. Desperation without faith takes reprehensible turns at times. The price is always more than can be paid.

The elders of Jabesh tried to bargain with Nahash, the Ammonite, as they sought a compromised peace, or even a moratorium on the abuse which plagued the people of Israel. Without deliberation, Nahash gave his reply: "On this condition will I make a covenant [treaty] with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel" (1 Samuel 11:2). The conqueror at the conference table dictates the terms. These were stiff indeed. It is ever apparent that the spiritual enemy strikes first at the vision.

How different when we seek the LORD! Those who ask bread of Him do not receive a stone. If a fish is requested, they do not get a serpent. If it is an egg they seek, they are not the recipients of a scorpion (Luke 11:11-12). But when Israel turned to her Gentile neighbors for help, a burden was draped about their shoulders. A heavy tribute was imposed by the Assyrian king (Hosea 8:10); and, instead of relief, the burden was increased.

Esau bartered his blessing for a morsel of meat, then carried his burden with tears unable to find a place of repentance (Hebrews 12:16-17). The thirty pieces of blood money were the heaviest weight Judas Iscariot ever attempted to carry. He sold his peace of mind for the tarnished silver which brought him nothing but unavailing remorse (Matthew 27:3-4).

When the hand of faith reaches heavenward, it is supplied with lovingkindnesses and manifold grace. But when the hand of unbelief is stretched forth to the enemies of the LORD, the deposit sooner or later eats at the soul as does a canker. The world may extend its hand to the Christian,

but woe to him who clasps it! Israel had forgotten that GOD put a difference between them and the heathen (Exodus 11:7).

The "altars" which Ephraim made were the progenitors of sin, the forerunners of judgment and the monuments of disaster (Hosea 8:11). The "altars shall be unto him to sin" (Hosea 8:11) means that, apart from destroying them, which Ephraim was loath to do, there was nothing whatsoever that could be done with them that would not be tainted with sin. There is no possible function in connection with idolatry that could produce anything else. They walked into these blasphemous practices with their hearts closed, but with their eyes open. They wittingly did the very thing which JEHOVAH specifically forbade them to do, when He said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

The great things which GOD had spoken to these people (Hosea 8:12) should have overwhelmed their hearts with gratitude. They should have exclaimed continually with the psalmist: "Thy testimonies [O LORD] are wonderful"(Psalms 119:129). They should have confessed with Job: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). Instead they drifted so far and so long that the Word of the LORD was "a strange thing" (Hosea 8:12).

They continued to offer sacrifices with a semblance of proper procedure, but it was totally unacceptable to the LORD (Hosea 8:13). It was empty, formal, heartless and undevout. The reaction of the LORD was clear, forceful, condemning. "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth" (Isaiah 1:14). And because of this iniquitous display of corrupt hearts, the LORD told Hosea, "they shall return to Egypt" (Hosea 8:13).

As they built heathen temples, fenced cities became necessary (Hosea 8:14). Idolatry meant a turning from GOD; and a turning from GOD meant a turning from divine protection. As they turned their backs upon JEHOVAH they faced their enemies.

- Their idols filled their hearts but did not guard their frontiers.

- The walls they built about their cities were, in the face of divine judgment, as futile as a few sand bags against a tidal wave.

- They trusted more in these feeble defenses than they trusted the LORD, so GOD permitted Sennacherib to burn all Judah’s fenced cities except Jerusalem, and to plunder the palaces thereof.

Reviewing the incidents recorded in this one chapter alone, what is the reader’s impression of these people, the children whom JEHOVAH had nourished and brought up (Isaiah 1:2)?

Our conclusion must coincide with that of the Biblical statement: "Israel hath forgotten his Maker" (Hosea 8:14). This is the ultimate in forgetfulness.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

02.10 The Superficial Joy Of The People

CHAPTER TEN

THE SUPERFICIAL JOY OF THE PEOPLE (Hosea 9:1-17)

"Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people."

THUS THE CHAPTER BEGINS. And this is more than a word of caution. People are not, as a rule, rapturous on the eve of predicted sorrow; that is, if they place any credence at all in such a report. A convict would not shout for joy on the threshold of his execution. Tragedy has often knocked abruptly at doors, on the inside of which gaiety and revelry held sway; as for instance, the sacrilegious party of Belshazzar (Daniel 5:3-5; Daniel 5:30). Or, in more recent times, the sinking of the Titanic.

There were apparently intermittent periods of prosperity during the sixty years of Hosea's prophesying. Yet at such times, the people showed no disposition to hear the voice of GOD's Word (Jeremiah 22:21). They were bent upon gorging their depraved souls at the table of the gods as long as the opportunity lasted. The LORD warned that such revelry must be curbed. When He said, "Rejoice not, O Israel," it was unmitigated rebuke, as when an earthly father speaks firmly in reproof of an ironic grin on the countenance of the son whom chastening.

Although described as "a whoring from thy God" (Hosea 9:1), they nevertheless expected an abundance of harvest on their threshing floors. It rather strains the intellect in an attempt to comprehend why those who have no love nor time for GOD expect Him to give them rain for their fields, sunshine for their pleasure, and health to pursue their course away from Him. This was the status quo in Israel.

It was painfully disillusioning, but little believed, when the prophet told them pointedly that their fields would not produce (Hosea 9:2). And not only so, they would not be in the land at harvest time. They would be banished either to Egypt or Assyria under conditions similar to those which prevailed in the Egyptian bondage of their forefathers. (The reader may want to compare Hosea 8:13; Hosea 9:3; Hosea 11:5 with Deuteronomy 28:36.)

The salient feature about verse 3 (Hosea 9:3) is the firmness of divine address, occasioned by the people's levity. He tells them bluntly, instead of feasting on the clean food (Kosher prepared) of their own, they would be subsisting on the (ceremonially) unclean food of their captors.

Verses 4, 5 and 6 (Hosea 9:4-6) have to do with worship; and since it is stated that "they are all [spiritual] adulterers" (Hosea 7:4), their observances could not be acceptable. This fact is reaffirmed in verse 4 (Hosea 9:4). The "sacrifices" were but imitations of the Levitical design, and likened unto "the bread of mourners." While this expression is idiomatic of uncleanness, it has a simple connotation which must not be overlooked. The food of a mourner is never enjoyed. It is never satisfying.

He only eats because necessity drives him or the insistence of others induces him. This is obviously characteristic of an unspiritual man attempting to do something for GOD when his heart is not in it. His articulate thoughts, which betray his real attitude, are summed up in these words: "What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" (Malachi 3:14).

All who espouse unorthodoxy, in spite of outward appearances and in spite of motives and intentions, are certain to corrupt themselves by their very involvement. They neither please GOD nor profit themselves, "for their bread for their soul shall not come" by imitation or pretense, even though they are in "the house of the LORD" (Hosea 9:4).

Religious devotion can be strong enough to survive the most prohibiting conditions. It burns in the heart of man with much intensity, ignoring threats, even defying death itself. But what will Israel do regarding the feasts of the LORD? How can they observe the solemn occasions (Hosea 9:5)? In fellowship with JEHOVAH or out of fellowship, orthodox or unorthodox in their living habits, they nevertheless observed with meticulous regularity the "special" days of worship as they occurred.

The answer to this question has already been given: "I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts" (Hosea 2:11). Conditions in captivity would render worship impossible. As in the Babylonian captivity, where they hanged their harps on willow trees and sat songless by the rivers, even so will they find themselves in utter despair.

Because of the brutality of the invaders, augmented perhaps by famine, deaths occurred in great numbers. The Egyptians gathered up the bodies and buried them at Memphis (Hosea 9:6). This confirms the fact that at least some were deported to Egypt. Memphis was a city of Egypt situated on the western bank of the Nile. The name itself is a compound of two hieroglyphics meaning "haven of the good," "tomb of the good man," or "the abode of the good."

What an ironical suggestion! Instead of being good, GOD termed them iniquitous and adulterous. The eulogistic funeral address of the deceased cannot improve his condition. As many of them go down to their death rebelling against GOD, they leave little but mockery in the homeland as a monument to their unspiritual activities.

The "pleasant places [of idolatry]" into which they poured their money (silver) become covered with thorns and thistles (Hosea 9:6). How important to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven where corrosives of passing time cannot corrupt!

Now the day of reckoning has come. Israel knows that this is the wrath of GOD being visited upon them (Hosea 9:7). The prophet Isaiah asked solemnly: "And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help?" (Isaiah 10:3).

"The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad" (Hosea 9:7) is a twofold characterization, the second part standing in apposition to the first. The definite article identifies a particular prophet. This points, then, not to the foolish false prophets who led them astray, but to the man of GOD who prophesied what they now recognize as having come to pass. The terminology is but a reflection of what they thought of the prophet who brought them the true facts. They considered him a fool for being a preacher of judgment to come. They looked upon the spiritual servant as

being "mad," narrow-minded, fanatical. It is precisely the accusation which Festus hurled in the face of the apostle Paul: "Thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24).

The reference to "the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred" refers to the degree of their idolatry and the extent of their punishment therefore. If the sentence meted out by the Judge of all men seemed stiff, let it be known that the provocation could not permit of anything less severe. There is no question but that they were held in derision and treated with much hatred by their captors, but only GOD could assess the seriousness of their transgressions. He is just.

In their disillusionment, knowing now that it is the hand of JEHOVAH upon them in chastening, they appraise the situation with an admixture of commendation and contempt - esteem for the true prophet, and bitterness for the false prophet. The former they know now to have been a "watchman of Ephraim" - one concerned about their spiritual welfare, or, as Church leaders are termed, those that "watch for your souls" (Hebrews 13:17).

They know now that he had been with their GOD (Hosea 9:8). The prophet for whom they have now such pronounced dislike is the one who (personally or representative of many) encouraged them in their waywardness. "The prophet" of verse 7 (Hosea 9:7) and "the prophet" of verse 8 (Hosea 9:8) are distinguishable by opposite descriptions in the context. The false prophet proved in the end to have been a snare. Instead of being a spiritual force in the assembly, he is now recognized as having been a scourge (hatred) "in the house of his God" (Hosea 9:8).

He who looks upon the heart declares: "They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah" (Hosea 9:9). Gibeah means "a hill"; and the unfavorable references to it may associate it with "the high places" (2 Kings 12:3; 2 Kings 15:4; 2 Kings 15:35) which were so nauseating to the LORD who, remembering their perversions, will punish these leaders properly (Hosea 9:9).

From the beginning it was not so. There was a time, the LORD recalls, when His people were as refreshing to Him as a cluster of luscious grapes would be to one in a wilderness, or as tree-ripened figs are delicious to the taste of the hungry. How sadly has the complex of these covenant people changed "Woe to the crown of pride [an overestimation of self], to the drunkards of Ephraim [intoxicated with idolatry], whose glorious beauty is a fading flower" (Isaiah 28:1).

Then the LORD, who did not refrain from publicizing all the sad facts concerning His people (Isaiah 1:2), puts His finger on one specific, filthy type of perversion: "They went to Baal-peor, and separated [involved] themselves unto [in] that shame" (Hosea 9:10). The character of this "shame" is discoverable; but, as the HOLY SPIRIT here does not define it, even so commentators are loath to make definite statements concerning it. It involved a degrading practice with young, unmarried women.

The record states: "And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads [presumably of those involved] of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun" (Numbers 25:3-4). GOD moved with vigor to end this scourge.

While Isaiah spoke of Ephraim’s glory "fading" (Isaiah 28:1), Hosea states: "As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird" (Hosea 9:11). Swift, intense, general, this judgment of the LORD

was to plague their posterity at conception, during gestation and at birth (Hosea 9:11). And should children be reared, they would die untimely deaths (Hosea 9:12). Rebellion against GOD, with its tragic results, gives the offspring of Ephraim no brighter future than to be the victims of murderers (Hosea 9:13).

In verse 14 (Hosea 9:14), the prophet seems to interrupt the LORD with something of an involuntary, expulsive outburst:

"Give them, O Lord-." And then, words fail him. Moses too under similar conditions was hard pressed in laying bare his heart of concern before the LORD. Moses said:

"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin." And he too lacked utterance. If compassion is sorrow excited by the distress or misfortune of another, both Moses and Hosea were eminently compassionate.

"Give them, O Lord-," the prophet begins to plead.

Then abruptly his petition changes to inquiry: "What wilt thou give?" In substance, he is saying, "Under these circumstances, what could you possibly give?" Then, as the vision of slaughtered children strikes him, he pleads:

"Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts" (Hosea 9:14). He makes bold to request that the LORD miraculously prevent the birth of children. The request cannot be granted, but the prophet is in no wise reproved for his sincere intercession, as the LORD moves on to further condemn the lusts and abominations of the people.

Going back to the head waters of this polluted stream of licentious acts, JEHOVAH points to the place where He was first dethroned from the hearts. "All their wickedness is [began] in Gilgal," He says, "for there I hated them" (Hosea 9:15).

That is, He hated what they did. And what did they? There the leaders revolted; there they spurned the love of GOD. As a consequence, they must be driven from the land (Hosea 9:15). Blight will cover their fields; and the mortality rate of infants will be appalling (Hosea 9:16).

"My God will cast them away," Hosea concludes in his own heart, as though he were reasoning, "GOD means what He says." And it is all because they would not hearken unto the LORD (Hosea 9:17). Who knew this better than Hosea, for he had communicated the LORD’s message to them. He was a witness to the fact that they stopped their ears and hardened their hearts.

What essentially is the difference between the "stocks" (standing wooden idols, Hosea 4:12) which the Israelites espoused, and the unsightly totem poles which missionaries find today among the heathen? The fact that the actors in the former case were cultured and refined, and those in the latter ignorant and superstitious, does not alter the sad truth that both worshiped at the same profitless shrine. Israel’s guilt was the blacker because she sinned not only against light but also against love.

What is to be the future of these dispersed people thrust from the land by the just judgment of GOD? "They shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hosea 9:17). "I will scatter you among the heathen [Gentiles], and will draw a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your

cities waste" (Leviticus 26:33).

This was the prophecy. History records its fulfillment.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

02.11 The Vine That Withered

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE VINE THAT WITHERED (Hosea 10:1-15)

THE READER WILL HAVE OBSERVED how the descriptive metaphors abound in the Book of Hosea. The people have already been referred to in such figures as a backsliding heifer (Hosea 4:16), a treacherous dealer (Hosea 5:7), a sick man (Hosea 5:13), adulterers (Hosea 7:4), a cake not turned (Hosea 7:8), and a silly dove (Hosea 7:11). Now we are told that "Israel is an empty vine" (Hosea 10:1).

The word "fruitful" might better fit the picture. Jacob set an imposing precedent for business acumen, and his descendants have become famous for their dexterity in successful enterprise - in finance, in business, in industry. They have had through the centuries an almost uncanny ability to prosper even in the midst of adversity. Handicap only challenges their initiative. Thus, in the days of Hosea, in spite of the famines and plagues, they found it possible to produce - so much so, in fact, that they were referred to as a luxuriant vine.

The complaint of the LORD was not that they were fruitful, but that they were selfish. They used their income for self-enjoyment, and that of a very corrupting nature. As their fruitfulness increased, their altars multiplied and their "goodly images" became more numerous (Hosea 10:1).

This is the usual course. More wealth, less worship; more substance, less submission. There are notable exceptions, of course, but this seems to be the general pattern, since the deceitfulness of riches is prone to drown devotion to GOD.

The spiritual implications become more apparent in verse 2 (Hosea 10:2). Their hearts were divided. Their idols had wrought havoc. The nefarious influence of idolatry had deflected the affections of the people from the LORD. This explains why they did not cry unto Him with their hearts (Hosea 7:14). Many kinds of heart conditions are mentioned in the Scriptures. The heart may be pure, upright, clean, wise. Or, it may be panting, burning, rejoicing.

Again, it may be smitten, wounded, proud, sick. It may be either whole (Psalms 9:1), or it may be divided (Hosea 10:2). A double heart is a deceitful heart. It attempts to embrace divergent interests, to espouse opposite ideologies. The Galatians subscribed to both Judaism and Christianity.

It was Hosea’s responsibility to inform his people that their guilt would be discovered; that their altars of shame would be broken down; that their idolatrous images would be destroyed (Hosea 10:2). He announced further that the day would come when they would be forced to lament, "We have no king" (Hosea 10:3). The reason, he emphasized, would be very clear. They will confess, "We feared not the LORD" (Hosea 10:3). The kings whom they desired, demanded and followed, led them to a disastrous end. They had no deliverance to offer the people in the hour of distress.

How different it was with their forefathers who had a godly king! "And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented [bitter of heart], gathered themselves unto him [David]; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men" (1 Samuel 22:2). But here is a people in a dark hour without a king to help and without even their false means of worship. The secular supports are gone. They must fall back either upon GOD or upon nothing. And how can they fall back upon Him whom they have rejected? Their kings "[swore] falsely" in pledging allegiance to the Assyrian monarch while making a treaty with the Egyptians.

"Thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field" (Hosea 10:4). The second invasion of Shalmaneser is imminent, and this instrument of divine chastening would be bitter indeed. It is likened unto hemlock, a poisonous plant which grows in waste places along banks, under walls. It is said to be fatal to cows when they eat it. In humans it causes paralysis, convulsions and death. It is presumed to be the poison administered to Socrates. And the word "furrows" is not the word we meet in verse 10 (Hosea 10:10). Here it means "to accumulate," as water filling an excavation during a severe downpour of rain. Yet, in spite of the terrifying aspects of the prophecy, there was no perceptible concern about the message which Hosea faithfully presented to them.

The prophecy anticipated the mental attitude and heart reaction of the people of Samaria when the invaders would seize the (golden) calf of Beth-aven. There would be (superstitious) fearfulness and mourning (Hosea 10:5) as the idol over which the priests rejoiced was carried away. There is no lasting pleasure in anything that is not ordained of the LORD. "The world [with all its vaunted pleasure] passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of GOD abideth forever" (1 John 2:17).

The worthlessness of idols is seen in that instead of protecting its worshipers from deportation, the calf itself is carried away by the heathen, much to the dismay and shame of Israel (Hosea 10:6). But not only was the idol of no help in their hour of need, their king likewise is utterly unable to give assistance. He is cut off "as the foam upon the water." He is as unstable and as useless as bubbles whipped up by lashing waves on the surface of the sea.

A striking enemy aims to destroy points of vital interest. The "high places" were very close to the hearts of these idolatrous people. This spiritual perversion raged like a forest fire out of control, but the enemy will soon destroy these idols at Aven (Bethel). Aven means emptiness; Bethel, the house of the LORD. What had been the house of the LORD had become a place of vanity. And this is precisely what happens in any day when the people conduct themselves contrary to GOD’s Word. Apostate Christendom has yet to learn the truth of this lesson.

The gold and silver they had invested in idols would prove a total loss; and the lack of them would leave only a dismal void in their hearts. With nothing to gratify, they would prefer death to life. They would look to the mountains and plead for them to fall on them, and cover them, and hide them from the wrath of GOD (cf. Hebrews 10:31; Revelation 6:16-17).

"O Israel," the LORD laments through the prophet, "thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah" (Hosea 10:9). In that day of civil strife, the people of GOD, instead of allying themselves against the "children of iniquity," fought against each other. "And the men of Israel went out to battle

against Benjamin" (Judges 20:20). This was approximately 650 years before, thus suggesting the indescribable longsuffering of the LORD. There can be no alternative at this time. Divine judgment must fall. Both Israel and Judah must become fellow sufferers in captivity. They must trudge along together in the path of hardship since they fell together in the same condemning sin.

As a yoke of oxen, each in his own furrow, bearing an identical burden in the same field, they must feel the goading of their captors.

There should be no element of surprise in this announced judgment. The people are reminded of the lengthy duration of their wicked ways. They had been warned continuously. "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them" (Malachi 3:7). Throughout their history there was ever a bold disregard of divine warning. JEHOVAH does not need to justify the rod, but He does clearly reveal the necessity for it.

We remind that the word "furrows" in verse 10 (Hosea 10:10) is to be distinguished from the references in Hosea 10:4 and Hosea 12:11. Its primary meaning here has to do with alienation and breach of promise. This being true, and since "bind" means to be "put in bonds," and "two" means "dual," it may better read, "They shall put themselves in bonds by their duality [divided heart, Hosea 10:2], their double lives alienating them from GOD."

They will actually eat the fruit of their own ways (Proverbs 1:31). They will reap what they have sown.

- Pharaoh drowned babies and was himself drowned in the Red Sea.

- Haman made a gallows and died thereon.

- Adonibezek amputated the thumbs and great toes of seventy kings only to suffer like treatment (Judges 1:6).

"God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Verse 11 (Hosea 10:11) is a preview of their experience in captivity. It pictures the hard labor to which the people will be subjected, and shows how Ephraim will attempt to escape the more severe toils. Since treading grain on the threshingfloor is less strenuous than ploughing the soil, through clever manipulation he thought he could spare himself the greater hardships. Then too as the heifer, privileged by no muzzle, could eat the corn, Ephraim hoped to inveigle from his captors some degree of privilege.

"Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught" would indicate knowledge by experience. But quickness of wit and clever intrigue will avail nothing in this instance. This is divine judgment. GOD says, "but I passed [the Assyrian yoke] over upon her fair neck" (Hosea 10:11). Those who are bold in their rebellion against GOD entertain vain thoughts. "With our tongue will we prevail" (Psalms 12:4) is a sample of their wishful thinking. Ephraim’s hopes of escaping severity will be dashed to the earth. The Assyrians will prove themselves harsh taskmasters.

In spite of their increasing indignities, their undiminishing indifference, and the approaching zero hour of judgment, divine compassion leaps the barrier of their obduracy and grants the people one further opportunity to repent. "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy" is the gracious

entreaty. With what excited passion Hosea pressed this challenge upon them! But they would have none of it. Their faith had been shattered. Idolatry had taken its toll.

They either placed no credence in what GOD said, or they lacked confidence in the accuracy and sincerity of the prophet. They either felt that judgment would not actually come, or if it did they would survive somehow. They displayed no concern. It is difficult indeed to analyze the attitude of obstinate unbelievers. "Everyone turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle" (Jeremiah 8:6).

Thus the offer of GOD was spurned.

"Break up your fallow ground," the prophet exhorts (Hosea 10:12). "Fallow ground" was ploughed soil, neglected to the point that the sun had baked it and the thorns had cluttered it (Jeremiah 4:3), making it unfit for sowing.

The imagery would indicate some effort expended in the right direction, then interrupted before the proper end was accomplished. Every age has those who make some move toward spiritual enterprise without getting beyond the initial step. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you?" (Galatians 5:7), Paul demanded of the Galatians.

With Ephraim the semblance of orthodoxy was faint indeed. The heart was divided; the worship was idolatrous. A "breaking up" was necessary. This could have been accomplished by their seeking the LORD as Hosea pleaded (Hosea 10:12). This would have stayed the judgment. The LORD would have come and rained righteousness upon them (Hosea 10:12).

Perhaps in any other realm, the cause would have been given up as lost. However, the prophet ceases not to warn. "Ye have plowed wickedness; ye have reaped iniquity," he continues to point out. It was a harvest of superstitions and vices. The proof of their perversions could not be denied. They subscribed to the false; they were about to suffer for their folly. Trust in their idols and confidence in their standing armies would only mock them in their misery.

Their pseudo saviors were helpless to spare Samaria from the hand of Shalmaneser. The case of Beth-arbel was but the predeveloped picture of the ensuing calamity at Bethel. The mother being dashed in pieces upon her children (Hosea 10:14) explains how the idols which they had begotten would be the cause of their downfall. The king of Israel (Hoshea) would be captured readily; indeed as quickly as the dawn is put to flight by the rising sun (Hosea 6:4; Hosea 13:3). Those whose trust is not in the LORD have no safe refuge (Proverbs 18:10).

~ end of chapter 11 ~

02.12 The Reminiscence Of The Lord

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE REMINISCENCE OF THE LORD (Hosea 11:1-12)

LOVE-LIGHT from the heart of GOD shines in the darkest places as evidence in the opening of this chapter. "I loved him . . . I taught Ephraim . . . I drew them . . . with bands of love."

When we touch upon the love of GOD, we plunge ourselves into an ocean whose depths have never been fathomed. It is all-embracing, all-inviting, all-supporting, all-supplying. And it is this matchless love which underlies every divine warning, the spurning of which, as was true with Hosea's people, makes more terrible the fearful storms of judgment when they break.

This chapter calls to mind GOD's former benefits to His people - a subject which is dealt with copiously in the Scriptures. Joshua, during his memorable convention at Shechem, gave an appealing review of the goodness of the LORD (Joshua 24:1-33). The psalmist also delineated the righteous acts of the LORD (Psalms 106:1-48). But Israel lapsed into serious ingratitude. Earlier instruction in righteousness was ill-regarded. Former lessons in loyalty were forgotten. Challenges to steadfastness were ignored.

Now they are wanderers, compromisers, spiritual adulterers, threatened with impending judgment. It is against this black background that these choice jewels of JEHOVAH's expressed affection shine. The people are reminded that the love of GOD made possible the deliverance of their fathers from Egyptian bondage.

- It was love that broke Pharaoh's grip.

- It was love that rolled back the waters of the Red Sea.

- It was love that fed them manna each day.

- It was love that kept their garments from becoming threadbare.

- It was love that cleared the passage through the Jordan River.

- It was love that prepared the land flowing with milk and honey and set the table for them in the wilderness.

Attention is called to Matthew 2:15 where Hosea 11:1 is quoted concerning JESUS, the true Israel according to Isaiah 49:1-3. Here we automatically have a contrast. Here we have a perfect gauge to measure the faltering nation. The true Israel affirmed: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). The true Israel countered the deceptive enemy with "It is written." The true Israel turned from the glory of earth by demanding "Get thee hence, Satan." But, when the tempter came to Israel of old, "they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images" (Hosea 11:2). They fell.

In His reminiscence, the LORD speaks not only of having loved Ephraim, but of teaching him (Hosea 11:3). This opens to our view an impressive area of Biblical truth. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written, that thou mayest teach them" (Exodus 24:12).

This instruction was given purposely that the people might "put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Leviticus 10:10).

The description of their offspring in Hosea proves how far afield they had gone. They had become most unholy; they were spiritually unclean. The line of demarcation was lost sight of. Baal-peor was the filthiest of their idolatrous departures. Add to this the caricatures on the wall of the temple (Ezekiel 8:9-10), weeping for Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14), worship of the queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 44:17), and the abominable "high places." These were the acts of the children who were nourished and brought up by JEHOVAH, now rebelling against Him (Isaiah 1:2).

In His gracious dealings, JEHOVAH "drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4). The ordained leadership was the finest - Moses, Joshua and Samuel; Isaiah and Jeremiah, Amos and Hosea. These leaders were sympathetic, compassionate, patient and persistent. Through their ministry, GOD sought the hearts of His people. Even in their disobedience, divine love continued to flow. When bound in slavery, GOD lifted, as it were, the jaw-yokes and extended them meat (Hosea 11:4).

As one preferring the lesser of two evils, the people reasoned that Egyptian bondage would be better than Assyrian if they must be carried away. The prophet’s message quickly countered this wishful thinking: "He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king." Why? "Because they refused to return [to the LORD]" (Hosea 11:5).

They forgot that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). They gambled on their political intrigue. They played off the king of Assyria against the king of Egypt. It failed. Soon the enemy cavalry would plunder their cities and villages, the sword of judgment doing its complete work (Hosea 11:6). The ruined heaps of their destroyed institutions would fill them with sorrow, but would not lead them to repentance.

"How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" (Hosea 11:8) is more than a plaintive cry. It is the lament of grief. It is the reverberation of concern. It is the outburst of love. GOD’s heart was turned within Him. But Israel’s provocation called for severe judgment. Her licentiousness and spiritual adultery deserved the sternest of treatment. But "how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" the LORD inquired, not that He was asking a question of the people, but as further indication of His reluctance to invoke judgment. Admah and Zeboim were companion cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This concern in the heart of GOD found no response in the lives of the people, especially in those of the northern kingdom. With false worship everywhere, deceit was rampant in the house of Israel (Hosea 11:12). The more GOD loved, the less He was loved. Little wonder we read such exclamations as "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee?" (Micah 6:3).

The epidemic of ungodliness is nowhere more strongly, expressed than in verse 12 (Hosea 11:12). "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies," means that everywhere the LORD looked He saw the false - the profane and wicked representations. The house of Israel generally practiced deceit in their unwholesome engagements with heathen worship.

Here again is a striking contrast between Israel of old and the true Israel (JESUS CHRIST). When the FATHER inspected His Lamb for the sacrifice, He assured, "Neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9).

It must not be construed that Judah was innocent of this blighting plague of idolatry. Jeremiah's conflict with them in their waywardness is a sad commentary on their departure from the faith. However, there were in Judah those that "yet ruleth with GOD, and is faithful with the saints" (Hosea 11:12). To serve GOD is to rule with Him. Being faithful with the saints indicated some sincerity and devotion on the part of a few. While the LORD must disapprove every false way and condemn every sin, it is beautiful to note how He observes and commends even the faintest trace of devotional earnestness.

History records how this slight glimmer of testimony in Judah faded into the dense darkness of their disobedience, desertion and destruction. Their national existence ceased, and their last king Zedekiah had his eyes thrust out and the fetters affixed. He was held in prison until the shades of death enveloped him (Jeremiah 52:11).

~ end of chapter 12 ~

02.13 The Balances Of Deceit

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE BALANCES OF DECEIT (Hosea 12:1-14)

MUCH LIKE THE CHURCH TODAY, GOD's ancient people were out of agreement with the divine purpose, out of line with the divine standard, and out of touch with divine power. When self-interest supersedes sovereign claims, there is a state of rebellion against the Most High. When our way fails to coincide with GOD's way, there is a state of broken fellowship. Then the last challenge comes. One day the last warning is given. Persistent backsliding had brought Israel to this point.

As another has pointed out, Jacob and Ephraim stand in noticeable contrast - the latter self-reliant and trusting the kings of Assyria and Egypt; the former weak and dependent and trusting JEHOVAH, the GOD of his father, Isaac.

Jeremiah reports that the people became so vain that they disrespectfully termed GOD's true prophets "wind" (Jeremiah 5:13). But GOD said, "Ephraim feedeth on wind" (Hosea 12:1). Since, in a real sense, we are what we eat, the people were unstable - unsound. The figure is supported by their alliances with idols and idolaters, and by their treaties with ungodly nations. And this lamentable condition was growing worse by the day. Their condition was pernicious. They attempted to buy Egypt's favor through gifts of oil instead of seeking divine blessing through obedience. Unbelief makes spurious moves.

Verse 2 (Hosea 12:2) would indicate that JEHOVAH could no longer commend Judah. He must now move to chasten. If the more conservative southern kingdom cannot be spared, what will be the end of the northern?

As Ephraim so frequently in this prophecy is used to denote the ten tribes, even so Jacob is used to designate the two; and the thumbnail sketch of this son of Isaac is, in a true sense, a lamentation of JEHOVAH. In verse 3 (Hosea 12:3), we are reminded of GOD's favor toward Jacob from his birth to his adulthood. He had prevailed with GOD through his strength of faith. He had made supplication with earnestness (Genesis 32:1-32). GOD met him at Bethel where the patriarch vowed: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go . . . then shall the Lord be my God" (Genesis 28:20-21).

Now witness the vast spiritual difference between Jacob and his posterity. Their spiritual strength has been dissipated through compromise with the heathen and complicity with their pagan works. Instead of tenderness of heart there is impenitence and obduracy. Now rebellion has replaced the submission which made their forefather great. The LORD who met Jacob at Bethel also finds these descendants there, but how? Certainly not imitating their father in saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place" (Genesis 28:16). The conscious presence of GOD is unknown to them. Instead of the LORD of hosts being memorialized at Bethel (Hosea 12:5), their idols are the bleak monument to the forgotten GOD.

With the surging emotion expressed in this reminder of past blessing, there leaps from the heart of GOD another plea for their return. "Turn thou to thy GOD . . . and wait on thy GOD continually" (Hosea 12:6).

It must be pointed out that the word "wait" in this instance differs in meaning from the two other occurrences in the prophecy. In Hosea 6:9 it means "to tarry"; in Hosea 7:6, "to lurk" or "to ambush." Here in verse 6 (Hosea 12:6) it means "to wait for" or "to expect." This corresponds with the thought expressed in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "to wait for his Son from Heaven."

In this ancient day, there was little or no evidence of a work of faith. Unbelief prevailed. There was no labor of love. Hearts were hardened. There was no patience of hope (in GOD) for they turned deceptively to both the Assyrians and the Egyptians for security.

"They shall find none iniquity in me that were sin" (Hosea 12:8) is a classic in self-justification. It is the apex of boastfulness. It is logic forced into a strange setting. Paraphrased, Ephraim asserts, "I am a successful businessman. I have been prosperous. After all the prophet’s denunciation, nothing can be found wrong with my dealings."

It is the agelong custom of resting on personal pride to justify one’s indifference toward GOD. It is the delusion of one "that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). It were better far to affirm with Paul: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18).

But what does the LORD say about this boaster? Bluntly this: "He is a merchant, [all right, but] the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress [defraud, or get deceitfully]" (Hosea 12:7).

Quite a conflict indeed between Ephraim’s impression of himself and GOD’s statement of fact. And let us remember that this symbolic illustration concerns not one man but a nation. "The balances of deceit" intimate the wrong kind of measuring rod - faulty perception. Not until we get to the last chapter of the prophecy do we have the least hint that they are willing to turn from the work of their hands, their idols. They displayed an utter lack of spiritual discernment.

And how could it be otherwise? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). By the same means come instruction, direction, devotion, discernment. They turned from the message of GOD; and, in so doing, they turned from these necessary derivatives. They lived, moved and operated outside the orbit of divine illumination.

Why did not their leaders see the value of subscribing to divine precepts, of pursuing the godly way, of obeying GOD’s Word from Heaven?

George Washington was not ashamed to affirm: "The world cannot be governed without this Book [the Bible]"

Ulysses S. Grant urged: "Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet anchor of your liberties; write its precepts on your hearts, and practice them in your lives."

Calvin Coolidge maintained "If American democracy is to remain the greatest hope of humanity, it must continue abundantly in the faith of the Bible."

John Wesley testified: "I am a Bible-bigot. I follow it in all things, both great and small,"

Daniel Webster asserted: "The Bible is a Book of faith, and a Book of doctrine, and a Book of morals . . . of special revelation from GOD."

Ephraim, forgetting his Maker (Hosea 8:14), became estranged from GOD's wonderful Word. He walked on dangerous territory. The abyss of disaster was just before him. He pressed blindly onward. And so go the masses of humanity today.

Again, we have the outpoured heart of GOD. First, we have His further reminder of the fact that it was He who intervened in behalf of their fathers in Egypt. It was He who delivered them when they cried for help (Exodus 3:7). And he is going to deliver again! He will make them "to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast" (Hosea 12:9). But, will these people, like their forebears wandering in the wilderness, take an unnecessary detour? Will they fail at this point as their forefathers failed at Kadesh-Barnea. Apparently so. What a fearful circuitous course most people take to arrive at the center of GOD's will for their lives, if indeed they arrive at all!

Second, they must be reminded that they were not without light. GOD had spoken to them through prophets such as Ahijah, Jonah, Shemaiah, Iddo, Azariah, Hanani, Jehu, Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Amos and others. GOD caused these faithful servants to employ "similitudes," that is, illustrations, historical precedents and parables, to impress upon them the truth of His message. He "multiplied visions," a prominent means of divine communication in those days, giving the people every opportunity to know Him and His way of blessing for them. Yet Hosea finds them in shameful idolatry and hardened in disobedience.

The enemy of man's soul had firmly entrenched himself in sacred precincts. Gilead and Gilgal, once the scenes of godly devotion, have now developed into spheres of blasphemous idolatry. It is no wonder that Jeremiah inquired: "Is there no balm in Gilead?" (Jeremiah 8:22). The question now is: Is there no godliness in Gilead (Hosea 12:11)?

The answer is immediately given: "Surely they are vanity" (Hosea 12:11). Gilgal, meaning "a heap of stones," appeared just that way to the LORD as He looked down because there were so many altars to false gods, even like heaps of stones along the countryside. "They sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal" (Hosea 12:11), proving that, even in decadent days, people will engage in religious ceremony. They will carry on some semblance of worship.

As Isaac sent away Jacob (Genesis 28:5), so JEHOVAH will send away his descendants. They will be carried into Mesopotamia, the land lying between the Tigris and the Euphrates. They too will become fugitive. "Jacob's hand as an infant won the birthright; as a penniless vagabond he won the kingdom; as a slave he won Rachel; as a cripple he won a title" (Jamison, Faucet & Brown). Now it is all loss for his posterity. There is no promise here of obtaining a kingdom or of receiving a title. The very best GOD can promise these rebellious people at this time is that they will be preserved (Hosea 12:13).

Their preservation throughout the years and their distinction from all other people is an amazing thing. It is not at all hyperbolical to use the expression, "the indestructible Jew." Mrs. Helen Mael is quite correct in her observation:

- The king of Egypt could not diminish him (Exodus 1:9-12).

- The waters of the Red Sea could not drown him (Exodus 14:1-31).

- The gallows of Haman could not hang him (Esther 5:14; Esther 7:10).

- The great fish could not digest him (Jonah 1:17; Jonah 2:10).

- The fiery furnace could not destroy him (Daniel 3:16-28).

- Balaam could not curse him (Numbers 23:7-8).

- The lions of Babylon could not devour him (Daniel 6:8-28).

- The nations of the world cannot assimilate him (Deuteronomy 33:29).

- The dictators of the world cannot annihilate him (Isaiah 14:1-3).

Chosen of the LORD as these people were and given the covenant seal of the Most High, their provocation incurred the bitter anger of GOD. There was no alternative but to chasten them (Hosea 12:14). There remains but one question at this juncture. When will the sad day arrive?

~ end of chapter 13 ~

02.14 The Epitaph Of Self-Destruction

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE EPITAPH OF SELF-DESTRUCTION (Hosea 13:1-16)

HISTORY IS REPLETE with grief-filled experiences of disappointment and defeat. Whether a Napoleon capitulating at Waterloo, a Kaiser Wilhelm signing an armistice in a forest in France, a Hirohito surrendering on a U. S. destroyer - defeat drapes a gloomy shroud about those whom it visits. It is incisively bitter. But what should be said about the people of GOD who have played into the hands of the enemy and have been cast into shame and disgrace? GOD Himself speaks the sad word: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hosea 13:9).

To the stated astonishment of all Heaven, two committed evils were discovered. First, they had forsaken the fountain of living water. Second, they hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13). That is to say, they indulged themselves in substitutes, then labored under the delusion that lasting benefit would result. It was then that JEHOVAH asked: "Is Israel a servant? is he a homeborn slave? why is he spoiled?" (Jeremiah 2:14).

Their intermittent attempts to improve conditions, apart from divine instructions and assistance, brought this interrogation: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23). Inability of self-reform and unwillingness to turn to the LORD for help left Israel in a perilous state.

When Ephraim was in fellowship with GOD, his word had a ring of authority. People felt its impact. He was respected and honored. But when he turned to idolatry, he forfeited his influence (Hosea 13:1). He sold his birthright for a "mess of pottage."

The flesh is subtle. It is sense and reason apart from the HOLY SPIRIT. It is sell-will in rejection of divine revelation. There is a point of self-abandonment to diversionary interests where better judgment is utterly lost. Then one is carried captive. "And now they sin more and more" (Hosea 13:2), the LORD sadly observes.

- Disregarding the Decalogue and the ceremonial instructions,

- Counting the word of the true and living GOD as of no value,

- They leaned unto their "own understanding." And herein they were seriously betrayed.

And what did their "own understanding" produce? More images, more idols! Their silver was spent for vanity. The work of the craftsman was dissipated energy.

The activities of the spiritually indifferent are always meaningless. Samson carrying away the gates of Gaza was an unproductive effort. It may have impressed some onlookers, but it did not elicit heavenly approbation.

"Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves" (Hosea 13:2). By what authority did they state this? Who originates the unauthorized procedures which have so plagued and rendered impotent the people of GOD down through the years?

Those who dethrone GOD from the citadel of their souls will find a usurper ready to ascend the throne of their lives. But how anyone once enlightened can kiss (approve, espouse) an endeavor so evidently contrary to the divine will as image worship is difficult to understand.

Since GOD is both omniscient and holy, such departures cannot escape His observation nor pass without His indictment. "Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away" (Hosea 13:3).

The cloud and dew, which in themselves have value for man, beast and vegetation, are not the main points of observation in this text. It is rather their instability, their quick passing, so symbolical of fickleness and lack of depth on the part of the people. Observe the further description: "As the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney" (Hosea 13:3). What could be more worthless than chaff and smoke? Yet relationship and love would limit the primary application, not to the people themselves, but to their illicit operations. Stirred-up chaff by a gust of wind and circulating smoke are irritating to the eyes and lungs. Thus, these licentious indulgences on the part of His people became a stench in the nostrils of the Most High GOD.

Now comes one of those intermittent reminders of Deity. And, though unheeded, the compassionate warning further proves the patience of GOD and leaves the people without excuse. "I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no God but me: for there is no saviour beside me" (Hosea 13:4).

Ears are deaf indeed when the sharp two-edged sword of divine Truth fails to penetrate.

Hearts are hard indeed when the Word, a discerner of the thoughts and intents, makes no perceptible impact. Such were these ancient backsliders in their propensities toward idolatry.

"I did know thee" (Hosea 13:5), did acknowledge thee as Mine, did manifest tender care in the wilderness and in the drought. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). I knew thee as a shepherd knows his sheep (John 10:27). He sought and provided. He delivered and protected. But alas, divine provisions were taken for granted and their privileges were abused (Hosea 13:6)! Prosperity was their downfall, idolatry their sin.

The goodness and the severity of the LORD seem equally evident in these prophecies, GOD preferring to show goodness but forced by a rebellious people to employ firmness. His austerity is figured as "a lion," "a leopard" and "a bear" as the rod of His wrath must fall upon a disobedient company (Hosea 13:7-8). These wild beasts are symbolical of the Gentiles, the lion-empire being Babylonia; the bear, Medo-Persia; and the leopard, Graeco-Macedonia.

The only hopeful note, the singular pleasant suggestion, in the Book of Hosea is projected into the future: "I will be thy king: where is any other . . . ?" (Hosea 13:10). True, GOD gave them a king when they cried insistently in the days of Samuel (Hosea 13:11), but this first king was impeached, utterly rejected (1 Samuel 15:26). GOD only intended that they should have one king, and that King is yet to be enthroned.

In the meanwhile, the people show no inclination toward repentance. "The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up" (Hosea 13:12). The reference is to the oriental method of securing a treasure, hiding it away from anyone's reach or discovery. Or, in the words of a common colloquialism, "He thought he was getting away with it." "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). However, there is no place to hide sin apart from the atoning blood of the LAMB. The wrath of GOD will discover it anywhere else.

Looking upon this delusion of Ephraim, JEHOVAH simply commented, "He is an unwise son" (Hosea 13:13).

The truth is, he will pay dearly for his sin. "The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him" (Hosea 13:13), and their long-continued dispersion, made dark and dreadful by such inhumanities and brutalities as the concentration camps and the slaughter of six million by the hand of Hitler, magnifies the seriousness of persistent rebellion against the holy commands of GOD.

The ransom from the grave and redemption from death (Hosea 13:14) could, and in all probability do, have a dual application. The people will be brought from the graveyards of the nations (Ezekiel 37:21) and from the dust of their physical interment (Daniel 12:2). Sheik Farouki, leader of the Arab refugees in Jericho, is quoted in Time Magazine, Jan. 16,1956, as saying: "Ben Gurion is not a full man. He is a poet . . . not a man of facts. He wants to build a nation by raiding cemeteries, and making a people from the bones of history." This is precisely what is happening currently in the new statehood of Israel. It is what will develop in a more impressive and in a more conclusive manner at some future date.

Verse 15 (Hosea 13:15) is simply another way of saying: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof" (1 John 2:17). It is always preferable to choose GOD's way "than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25).

The fruitfulness of Ephraim, that is, the prosperity of the people, was soon to be cut short by the invading Assyrians. The well of their self-satisfaction would dry up. What they prized most highly, "the treasure of all pleasant vessels," would fall into the hands of their captors (Hosea 13:15).

The chapter closes with a terse, but almost imponderable, description of the desolation destined to ensue. The indignities and brutalities to be visited upon the populace, especially as affecting infants and pregnant women, never registered as a possible actuality in the minds of Hosea's hearers. "To whom shall I speak, and give warning?" GOD asks (Jeremiah 6:10).

The answer is reflected in the attitudes and actions of the people, of any people, in any day. In spite of the gracious, loving entreaties through faithful servants, "every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle" (Jeremiah 8:6).

The weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth in the day of disillusionment and judgment promises no consolation to those who disregard the warning of GOD. Nor could Israel charge GOD with the cruelties visited upon them. It must be attributed to her own misconduct, "for she hath rebelled against her God" (Hosea 13:16).

Israel wrought her own destruction.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

02.15 Prophetic Glimpses Of Recovery

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PROPHETIC GLIMPSES OF RECOVERY

WE TURN OUR ATTENTION now to those prophecies of Hosea which are yet unfulfilled.

As a preface to this unveiling of the future for the people of His love-covenant, JEHOVAH says: "I know the thoughts that I think toward you . . . thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). There is a future for the Jew; and there is a hope! Let us observe something of this program so certain of fulfillment.

RELATIONSHIP TO BE RECLAIMED

"It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hosea 1:10).

GOD was forced to say, "Loammi" (ye are not my people). Now He states that the day is coming when this will no longer be the case. Whatever the appellations attached to these people by GOD and man in their wanderings - and on man's part they have sometimes been most uncomplimentary - they one day will be addressed as "the sons of the living GOD."

We are prone to limit the application of the prodigal son parable to the reclamation of a backslidden Christian. But not so! Perhaps its primary meaning has to do with the restored ancient covenant people. What a welcome is in prospect! What rejoicing! What surprises! With what expressed amazement when they inquire: "What are these wounds in thine hands?" (Zechariah 13:6).

The text does not make clear who shall call them "sons of the living GOD," but relationship is the impressive fact admitted. Covenant dealings will be resumed. Joy will abound. A new day will have dawned with the "nightmare" of history obviated. "Thou shalt arise, and have mercy on Zion," the prophecy declares, then adds this assurance, "for the time to favor her, yea, the set time, is come" (Psalms 102:13).

RESTORATION REASSURED

"Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together" (Hosea 1:11).

This specifically prophesied reuniting of the divided kingdom has not to this time been realized, but the integrity of the divine promise makes it inevitable.

"Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, the LORD liveth, that brought up the children out of the land of Egypt; But, the LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers" (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

From the time Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was carried into Babylon (and died there so ignominiously) until this present hour, the Jews have looked and longed for the re-establishment of their kingdom.

Following the resurrection, when JESUS had shown Himself alive by many infallible proofs, the converted Jewish followers asked pointedly: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Who would be so unwise as to say that they meant the kingdom of GOD within them, or a kingdom of love? No, it was a literal matter in their thinking. Present-day expectation in this regard is reflected in the following excerpts from the Jewish Prayer Book:

"Blow the great trumpet of our delivery, and raise the banner of the ingathering of our exiles and assemble us together from the four corners of the earth.

"And return in mercy to thy city of Jerusalem and dwell in her midst as thou hast spoken, and restore her with a perpetual restoration speedily in our days."

JESUS said: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles [nations], until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Jerusalem is still trodden down. It is not delivered as yet. Why is it not delivered? Because the times of the Gentiles have not been fulfilled. How and when will Gentile dominion terminate? The time, of course, is not revealed, but it will be at the coming of CHRIST.

The manner in which this will be accomplished is presented in symbolic language. A Stone hewn without hands (CHRIST) shall fall on the feet and toes of the colossal image (Gentile powers) that has filled the earth. Current construction is but a monument to unbelief. It must go. The renovation will make way for the Great King and the restored kingdom. His righteousness shall fill the earth. "Out of Zion then shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). Then shall the knowledge of the LORD cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

"For great shall be the day of Jezreel" (Hosea 1:11). Whereas "Jezreel" meant "to scatter" in Hosea 1:5, here it means "to gather." That shall indeed be a great day! "And appoint themselves one head" (Hosea 1:11).

This in no wise suggests that they shall choose or elect themselves a leader. It means rather that they no longer will be a divided kingdom; and as a united people (Ezekiel 37:19) in the land they will acknowledge and approve one head.

That Head can be none other than the LORD JESUS CHRIST. The genealogy of Matthew 1:1-25 proves His royal right to the throne, while the genealogy of Luke 3:1-38 confirms His legal right.

That JESUS is the King of the Jews is well established. We have the testimony of the angel Gabriel at the annunciation (Luke 1:32); the word of the Eastern scientists at the time of His birth (Matthew 2:2); the inscription of the Roman government at His death (Matthew 27:37); the apostle Peter’s quotation at Pentecost (Acts 2:30). The chief priests admitted that JESUS said, "I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21). GOD never intended for the Jews to have any king other than His Son.

The late Alfred Edersheim, in The Life and Times of JESUS the MESSIAH, stated: "Israel’s greatest sin was in asking for a King and rejecting the King."

THE DOOR TO REALITY

"And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope" (Hosea 2:15).

Achor means "trouble." And what a dark valley will be the "day of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7)! But it will lead to the fulfillment of their hope - to their restoration and to the kingdom. It will be the dark hour before the dawn of millennial joy.

And melody will flood their souls. "She shall sing" (Hosea 2:15). No more wailing walls. No more need to hang their harps on the willows (Psalms 137:2). No more inability to produce harmony due to captivity in a "strange land" (Psalms 137:4). The latent chords will vibrate once more. The greatest inducement to this joyful melody will be the removal of all fear. The promise is that He will "make them to lie down safely" (Hosea 2:18). This will be a security unknown to them throughout the centuries under the Nebuchadnezzars, the Caesars, the Hitlers, and the Arab block.

The blighting names of Baalim, which once overshadowed the names of JEHOVAH in their idolatrous departures, will be blotted out as a thick cloud (Hosea 2:17). Then salutations of orthodoxy will have heart meaning. "I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; saith the LORD, and they shall say, Thou art my God" (Hosea 2:23).

THE PROMISED RETURN

"Afterward shall the children of Israel return" (Hosea 3:5).

Afterward! Painful as the intervening experiences are, they will be delivered from the destitution of "many days" (Hosea 3:4) to the delight of the "latter days" (Hosea 3:5). Then they will be no longer "without a king, and without a prince" (Hosea 3:4). They will "seek the LORD their GOD, and David their king" (Hosea 3:5).

This David is not Jesse's son. David of old was disqualified by the LORD Himself. He was not permitted to build the temple (1 Chronicles 28:3-4). The Bible does not state that he will be reinstated to reign.

JESUS is referred to as "the second man" and "the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45; 1 Corinthians 15:47) with regard to redemption. He is called "David" relative to His sovereign reign on earth. "The government shall be upon His shoulder" (Isaiah 9:6).

It should be as easy for the human mind to believe that a divine King, now with a human body, could reign on an earthly throne as to believe that the divine Creator could come into a human body and be nailed to an earthly cross. The apostle Paul believed it. He spoke of "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:14-15).

Isaiah tells us that "the LORD of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously" (Isaiah 24:23). In this verse we are told who will reign and where the seat of His power will be. "And the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again" (Zechariah 2:12).

Since some claim that JESUS is on David’s throne now, we may point out three prophetic designations concerning our LORD. He is said to be King, Prince of peace and the Chief Shepherd. Each designation characterizes a particular ministry.

- As the King of kings, He will rule.

- As the Prince of peace, He will bring peace to this restless world.

- As the Chief Shepherd, He will feed and care for His sheep.

But, in each instance, it is an earthly scene. Heaven does not need a King to rule, a Prince to bring peace or a Shepherd to feed.

- There the residents never hunger nor thirst.

- There the very atmosphere is one of sublime peacefulness.

- There the need for ruling is nonexistent.

JESUS must come back to this earth to fulfill this threefold need and to make good His promise.

"COME, AND LET US RETURN unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth" (Hosea 6:1-3).

Anyone reading these words would know that the statements concern another day - a future time. They are incongruous with the thinking of an apostate people, such as we have seen in the foregoing pages of this volume. They are most inappropriate for those who are "bent to backsliding" from the LORD (Hosea 11:7).

They would have been nothing short of mockery coming from the lips of those who spent their silver for idols and had forgotten their Maker (Hosea 8:14).

THE RENEWED VISION

"Come, and let us return unto the LORD" (Hosea 6:1) are words, which when sincerely spoken, will bring the Father’s welcome to the "prodigal son." They will be uttered! Of this we are certain. They will spring from a changed heart.

They will issue from repentant souls. They will denote a different attitude. They will betray a renewed vision. They will signal a revival spirit.

They will own their judgment as being of the LORD, both deserved and just. "He hath torn . . . he hath smitten," they will agree. "Thou art good, and doest good," the psalmist of old confessed. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psalms 119:68; Psalms 119:71). Nor is there any complaint here. There is confidence, however, that He who tore will heal; and He who smote will bind them up. This is more than the product of their faulty reasoning. It is the promise of divine revelation. the LORD will make all things right at His coming.

The people will assert: "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

While it admittedly hangs on the most frail thread, there is a hint that these days are periods, that one (the time of their dispersion) is past, that the "time of Jacob's trouble" is about to end, that the third day (national resurrection) is about to dawn. They know they will live in His presence - "in his sight." For both inspiration and courage, they assure themselves: "Then shall we know [experience], if [because] we follow on to know the LORD" (Hosea 6:3) Their assurance is further strengthened as they say; "He [the LORD] shall come unto us as [gently as] the rain" (Hosea 6:3).

The rod of judgment will not then be in His hand.

~ end of chapter 15 ~

02.16 The Remedy And Ultimate Recovery

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE REMEDY AND ULTIMATE RECOVERY (Hosea 14:1-9)

FEW BOOKS IN THE BIBLE close on a higher note, with a more climactic appeal, than Hosea.

- Genesis closes with "a coffin in Egypt."

- Deuteronomy ends with: "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses."

- The last chapter of Joshua speaks of "the bones of Joseph."

- The Book of Judges has as its sad summation: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

- The last chapter of II Samuel finds David in the dilemma of choosing his punishment for the sin of numbering the people.

- II Kings relates in its last verses that King Jehoiachin was in his thirty-seventh year of Babylonian captivity.

- The concluding chapter of Jeremiah portrays the brutal treatment of Zedekiah, last king of Judah: slaughter of his sons, loss of his eyes, imprisonment and death.

Some books, of course, close with a joyful note, but none is more dramatically impressive in this regard than Hosea.

THE REQUIREMENT STATED

There is in verse 1 (Hosea 14:1) what would seem to be a final call.

"O Israel, return unto the LORD thy GOD." Such an appeal in Malachi brought the objection, "Wherein shall we return?" Such an objection here is forestalled by the immediate explanation: "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

At this juncture it would be superfluous to describe the extent of the fall. The preceding chapters have painted the drab picture. What is important, however, is the manner in which they were instructed to return.

"Take with you words, and turn to the LORD" (Hosea 14:2).

The kind of words is indicated in the verse. "Say unto him, Take away all iniquity." They must be words of confession. Is this not always the requirement for the backslidden if a restoration is to be effected? "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

THE CONFESSION OFFERED

"Asshur shall not save us" (Hosea 14:3) is the beginning of their confession. In spite of their demand for a king like the Gentiles, in spite of their alliances with the Assyrians and the Egyptians, they now make bold to assert that salvation cannot originate from kings or nations, from influence or prestige. These have been painfully proved noncontributive to their welfare. The retrospect is now most disturbing.

"We will not ride upon horses [cavalry]," they confess. Civil defense is not necessarily spiritual defense. National security is not necessarily spiritual protection. Without spiritual health there can be no national strength. We may boast of man made satellites and of intercontinental ballistic missiles with the terrifying potential of nuclear energy, but what can any people do without GOD?

"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us" (Psalms 124:2-3). This will ever be true in spite of our military might.

"Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods." This is an outright renunciation of idols. It must come before GOD can deal in love. These ancient people had actually fashioned with their own hands images for religious engagements. "And he [Aaron] received them [contributed earrings, etc.] at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel" (Exodus 32:4).

THE REMEDY PRESCRIBED

"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). The simplicity here is profound.

The promise is precious. The remedy is designed to bring results. It cannot fail. When the love of GOD goes to work:

- The SAVIOUR comes to earth (John 3:16);

- The Redeemer goes to the Cross (John 15:13);

- The servant of CHRIST presses on (2 Corinthians 5:14);

- Christians are gracious toward one another (1 John 4:7);

- The worshiper adores his LORD (1 John 4:19);

- The wanderer is wooed back to the Father’s hearth (Luke 15:18).

The word "freely" does not carry the connotation of "gratuity." It is rather the thought of lavishness. There is something constraining, overpowering, overwhelming about divine love (2 Corinthians 5:14). It melts and moves the hearts of men. It warms and wins the emotions. Its magnetism attracts and holds the devotion when once it is shed abroad in the heart (Romans 5:5), that is, if no diversionary interest is allowed to contravene. Now the renunciation of idols clears the way for this divine potency to go to work.

THE REMEDY AND EFFECT

The Refreshing. "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (Hosea 14:5). The dew falls in the night, and the darkest period is yet to overtake them, but JEHOVAH will prove Himself "a very present help in

trouble." The dew falls silently, and this is how the Spirit of GOD always works in the lives of the people.

The big problem is always the heart problem. Whereas one day they did not cry unto the LORD with their hearts (Hosea 7:14), they will with deep sincerity ask: "What are these wounds in thine hands?" when "his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives" (Zechariah 13:6; Zechariah 14:4).

Then too the dew is penetrative, leaving no stem or leaf unvisited. Thus, when the love of GOD has its overwhelming and transforming effect, when "in one day... a nation [is] born," when the "blindness in part" (Romans 11:25) shall give way to clear, unaffected vision, these people shall be called, "The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD" (Isaiah 62:12). Then, free from the blemishes of a dreadful, ignoble past, they "shall grow as the lily" and become firmly established as the deep-rooted trees of Lebanon (Hosea 14:5).

The Renewing. "His branches shall spread" (Hosea 14:6). Heretofore they had been but dwarfed shrubs, stunted bushes - no imposing branches, no luxuriant verdure. But the day will come when, typified by Joseph of old, they will be "a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall" (Genesis 49:22). It is this extension, beyond the confines of self-interest, which touches the lives of others with blessing. This will make, not only for fruitfulness, but for beauty and fragrance as well.

The Return. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return" (Hosea 14:7). Could this, in a wider, more general application, mean that those who are truly saved, though now deviating from the narrow course, will inevitably be brought back into fellowship with GOD? There may be some scriptural suggestion to encourage such a thought. However, this passage pertains directly to Israel. When the fullness of divine love, their overshadowing banner (Song of Solomon 2:4), long ignored, has its perfect work, the right relationship will be restored and enjoyed.

The Revival. "They shall revive as the corn" (Hosea 14:7). The prophets frequently gave voice to such an appeal: "Revive thy work in the midst of the years" (Habakkuk 3:2). Said the psalmist: "Wilt thou not revive us again?" (Psalms 85:6). The answer is an emphatic "yes." The plea for quickening - some nine times in the Psalms 119:1-176 - means to revive, to keep alive, to nourish, to make strong, to recover, to repair. It would seem that in the ultimate kingdom blessing, the reviving will combine the force of all these meanings.

The Renunciation. "Ephraim shall say [says], What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hosea 14:8). The use of "Ephraim" instead of "Israel" in this instance is a purposed choice of words by the HOLY SPIRIT. Throughout the book Ephraim was frequently used, though representatively, to set forth the people’s involvements in idolatry. Now there is a different attitude entirely. And what has occasioned it? Let Ephraim speak for himself. "I have heard him, and observed him."

This ever determines the difference between devotion and indifference, between dedication and waywardness. The regrettable tendency toward spiritual disobedience is scripturally explained in this manner: "Eyes have they, but they see not; They have ears, but they hear not" (Psalms 115:5-6). One glimpse of the LORD through His Word, one earful of His message, and who would not join with Job in saying: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6)?

The Resolve. "I am (shall be) like a green fir tree" (Hosea 14:8). With renewed vision and revived determination, Ephraim anticipates better days. Like the fir tree, which is ever green, he promises that his spiritual life will be rich and real. He means now to be, as Paul urged upon Timothy, "instant in season, out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). This is the surge of "first love." It indicates spiritual aspiration, but overlooks personal inability to perform.

Hence, The Reminder. "From me is thy fruit found" (Hosea 14:8). How greatly do we need to be reminded that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

We are not "sufficient of ourselves . . . our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). Even in the Millennium there will be sin; and where there is sin there must be temptation. Where there is temptation, man's frailties require divine strength. Should this statement of Ephraim - that he means to be perennially faithful - project him into this future time of predominating righteousness, he nevertheless needs the sustaining power of the LORD. If it has to do with a less favorable day, the need is the greater.

The Recognition. "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them?" (Hosea 14:9). What things? Simply the things of this chapter, if not of the entire book - that GOD's people must not remain away from Him in a state of broken fellowship . . . that they should return. . . that they must bring words of confession in order for GOD to deal with them . . . that they must renounce their misdeeds. . . that GOD can heal the backslider. . . that He does it through His overwhelming love. . . that, being unto His needy people as the dew, He will refresh, renew and revive . . . that a return can be effected. . . that an erstwhile backslider can yet give a strong testimony. . . that GOD can make him fruitful again.

We are not long left in suspense regarding the prominent thought in the mind of the HOLY SPIRIT. Here it is crystallized: "The ways of the Lord are right" (Hosea 14:9). The difficulty with Israel was they chose divergent paths. They forgot that GOD's way is one; that man's way is quite another (Isaiah 55:8). They ignored the fact that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

They deliberately moved out of the will of GOD and plunged into disaster.

It is from this spiritual dilemma that the LORD eventually will extricate them. His plans for them call for a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). This purpose cannot be disannulled; nor can His hand be turned back (Isaiah 14:27). Had they been wise enough, sufficiently prudent, they would have escaped the treacherous detours over which they trudged so wearily in forty years of wilderness journeyings and these 2,500 years of world-wide dispersion. The outlook was so bleak to Ezekiel that there fell from his lips this plaintive cry: "Ah Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (Ezekiel 11:13).

The LORD quickly assured him: "I will even gather you [your people] from the people [the nations], and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 11:17).

Lest with Ephraim we forget our Maker, let us keep "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Lest with Judah we depart in avenues of waywardness, let us remember

that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

"Return unto the Lord thy God . . . take with you words" (Hosea 14:1-2).

THROUGH TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help" (Hosea 13:9). Here is love in its glorious transcendence. Love follows the backslider for a purpose. The purpose is to help. Well may the psalmist exult: the Lord is a "present help in trouble." And what trouble is more serious than the shipwreck of one's faith (1 Timothy 1:19)? Help is desperately needed then. And who but the LORD can lift one out of the quicksand of subtle, slippery waywardness? "In me is thine help," He says to Israel.

Now observe who was responsible for Israel's debacle. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." Is this not always the case?

- Who ruins the drunkard's life? He does.

- Who undermines the character of a robber? He does.

- Who blemishes the reputation of an immoralist? He does.

- Who crushes the testimony of a backslider? He does.

But how did Israel destroy themselves?

"And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding" (Hosea 13:2).

Sin is progressive - "more and more." This progression always points toward a sad end - destruction. "My people are destroyed," JEHOVAH laments (Hosea 4:6). Their divine distinctives were gone. Their idols had eaten like a canker and their testimony was threadbare. Their spiritual influence was nil. The leaves of their spiritual tree, as though frostbitten, had dried and fallen to the earth, there to be trampled under the foot of heathen derision as GOD's people became a hiss and a byword.

In these fearful times of their disobedience, the announcement was made, "her sun is gone down while it was yet day" (Jeremiah 15:9). The curtain fell. It has remained down for some 2,500 years, obscuring the face and favor of GOD, and leaving them without a sacrifice, a high priest, a king, etc. But the curtain will rise! "Thy sun shall no more go down. . . the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isaiah 60:20). Now we see something of the LORD's plans for these people - to give them a future and a hope.

The day is coming, nearing all the while, when He shall "give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3). Here is all the scintillating brightness of a diadem of gladness, the coronet of joy, the symbols of an Oriental ceremony of praise.

And one of the most striking features of this doxology of promise is that GOD will not rest until it is fulfilled. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the

righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth" (Isaiah 62:1).

This future glory will attract all the nations of the earth (Isaiah 62:2), and no more will the Gentiles spew forth invectives. The mouth of the LORD will state the salutation and it will be honored throughout the world (Isaiah 62:2).

The glorious transformation is explained in this manner: "Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isaiah 62:3). Marvelous? Indeed! The promise continues. "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Isaiah 62:4).

Here JEHOVAH answers the question He put to Jeremiah when He took him to the potter's house to speak to him. The vessel was marred, and the potter made it again as seemed good to the potter. That is, he worked it over until it came up to his standard of perfection so he could delight in the work of his hands. It was then that the LORD asked pointedly: "O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?" (Jeremiah 18:6). Of course, He can!

Jeremiah answered: "Ah Lord God! behold thou hast made the Heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee!" (Jeremiah 32:17). GOD not only can; He will!

Thus, the day in view sees the marred vessel "made... again." Then JEHOVAH will say: "Thou shalt be called Hephzibah [My delight is in her], and thy land (the holy land) Beulah [married]." That is, the nation, then the delight of the LORD, will be united and attached to the land as a bride is joined to her husband. And the peoples of the earth will refer to them as "The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord" (Isaiah 62:12). This is the beautiful picture just beyond the black corridor of suffering "the time of Jacob's trouble."

Yes, they "destroyed themselves." But how good and gracious of the LORD! How merciful! How patient! How forgiving! He will one day extend His hand of help. He will then lift them to unchallenged eminence among the peoples of the earth.

These are prophetical glimpses of recovery for the patient (Israel) still writhing in a prolonged sickness.

~ END OF BOOK ~

03.00.1 LEST YE FAINT

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S. Franklin Logsdon

Pastor, Moody Memorial Church, Chicago, Illinois

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03.00.2 e-Sword Preface

Preface As an e-Sword user, and a resource creator, I always try to find quality works I believe will be beneficial to others in their studies. I hope this fits that description, and that all who use this module will find it to be a blessing. To Dr. David S. Thomason, Ed Sandlin, and Pamela Marshall, Thank You for all of your help in proofscanning, I couldn’t do it without you all. A special thanks to Virgil Butts from Baptist Bible Believers for providing the text. To see this book and many other wonderful Fundamental Christian works, check out his website. http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/ For more great e-Sword modules, visit http://doctordavet.com/index.html. Your Brother In Christ, Jason L. Briggs

03.00.3 Table Of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS 01. THE COMPLETE BREAK-DOWN OF FAITH 02. BEHIND THE SCENE IN THE PRODIGAL'S LIFE 03. THE STRANGER IN THE TEMPLE 04. THE SECRET OF CONTINUAL TRIUMPH 05. THE STRATOSPHERE OF SPIRITUAL LONGING 06. THE DISTINCTIVE DIVINE DIFFERENTIATION 07. THE REPEATED REQUEST FOR REVIVAL 08. THE EFFECTIVE ANTIDOTE FOR APATHY 09. CURBING THE TIDE OF UNBELIEF 10. THE FURTHER APPEAL TO FELLOW-WORKERS 11. THE SIAMESE TWINS OF SPIRITUAL PROWESS 12. THE DANGER OF DISQUALIFICATION 13. PURPOSE GLORIFIED

03.00.4 Dedication

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO

DR. E. RALPH HOOPER

late dean of the London Bible Institute,

a vessel unto honour and mightily used of God as

a medical man, missionary, teacher, writer and counsellor.

His uncompromising stand for the revealed truth of God’s Word,

his energetic spirit and ever-gracious attitude

have been a spiritual stimulant to countless numbers-

and to the author.

“Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, LEST ye be wearied and faint” (Hebrews 12:3).

03.00.5 Foreward

FOREWORD

HERE IS AN UNUSUAL BOOK by an unusual writer. Here the reader will find a veritable wellspring of joyous refreshing. Pastor Logsdon, as this book clearly reveals, has diligently studied to show himself “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.” As a result, “according to the grace of God which is given unto” him, he has become “A wise masterbuilder”; and his skill is revealed in these studies.

There is a sense in which there is nothing new that is true. As another has said, “If it is new it isn’t true, and if it is true it isn’t new.” But there is a new way of presenting old truth, and our author has found the way. Here the reader will find no hackneyed phrases, no threadbare platitudes. The truth is here, but in a new garb. The food is the good old Bread of God, but it is served in plain dishes. The reader will be benefited as he scans these pages, and he will be delighted as well.

For many years I have known and loved Franklin Logsdon and esteemed him “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” It is a pleasure to commend this latest of his writings to God’s people everywhere.

Keep looking up, my son!

William L. Pettingill, D. D.

Pastor of the First Baptist Church

in the City of New York

03.00.6 Introduction

INTRODUCTION

DECADENT DAYS CALL FOR CHALLENGE. This is the major theme of the Minor Prophets and the point of emphasis in the second epistles. God's people so readily lapse into complacency of such alarming proportions that all heaven seems to become solemnly disturbed.

"O my people, what have I done unto thee? And wherein have I wearied thee?" (Micah 6:3).

Such were the intermittent surges from the heart of God in Old Testament days. Nor were conditions much more gratifying in the New. "It is high time to awake out of sleep" (Romans 13:11), warned the Apostle Paul. His colleague also found it necessary to arouse the hearts of the drowsy, careless believers with a challenge to renewed zeal. "I stir up (awaken fully) your pure minds" (2 Peter 3:1), Peter commented; and then added, "(2 Peter 3:1)" (2 Peter 3:11).

In the sad period when the Lord was forced, through Israel's disobedience, to withdraw His Shekinah glory from them, it was with extreme reluctance. The withdrawal was effected slowly-from the holy of holies to the threshold, to the east gate, to the east side of the mountain, thence to be seen no more until the last prophet of the legal period said of Jesus, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14).

In the midst of the departure of God's glory in ancient times, this sad necessity was expressed, "I will take the stony heart . . . I will give them an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19).

God desires a heart response to His blessed and faithful entreaties, but His people today, as of old, have stony hearts. Christians are unquestionably deficient in the realm of deep, settled convictions.

Standing by one's convictions means to maintain an uncompromising attitude with regard to that which is divinely approved.

- It is a firm refusal to deviate from the paths of orthodoxy.

- It is an avowed adherence to the principles and precepts of God's revealed word.

- It is that kind of spiritual stamina which is able to withstand vicious attacks.

- It is a definite stalwartness of character which remains unaffected in the midst of detracting influences.

- It is that strength of soul which shows no tendency toward surrender.

- It is a determination to press on when others are dropping by the wayside.

- It is a devotion that maintains its warmth when the temperature round about us is dropping.

- It is a vision which continues its focus upon the goal.

- It is a steadfastness which survives the current epidemic of indifference.

- It is purpose in its faithful display of resoluteness.

Many of the personalities of the Scriptures are identified by one particular characteristic. Meekness reminds us of Moses; patience, of Job; weeping, of Jeremiah; doubting, of Thomas; impetuosity, of Peter; while purpose is ever associated with Daniel.

But every true servant of God must of necessity be a person of purpose. The command of the Lord requires it: “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable . . .” Purpose makes for dependability, consistency, dedication, and accomplishment. Purpose allows no room for indecision, listlessness and uncertainty. Purpose is, to the servant of God, what the sense of direction is to the homing pigeon. It develops a desire for obedience to the divine commands and encourages a determination to fulfil His blessed will.

“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and shall walk, and not faint.”

03.01 The Complete Breakdown Of Faith

CHAPTER ONE THE COMPLETE BREAKDOWN OF FAITH “Carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). THE WEIRD CRIES of the coyote in the prairie wilds are rivaled only by the mingled moans of despairing hearts in the darkness of adversity. Down, down-down the declivities of a chasm of grief, disappointment or pain goes the sinking soul which has, at least for the time, lost its grip upon the anchorage of faith.

If the question were asked, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” (Psalms 42:11) the plunge of our spirits downward would at once be broken. There is no legitimate reason for the disintegration of inward fortitude when our blessed Lord is a present help in trouble, and when His sustaining grace is amply sufficient for our every requirement.

“Hope thou in God!” will prove for us, as well as for David of old, a profitable prescription. The practical point of importance in the hour of adversity is to turn our eyes from the tempest to the One who is mighty to deliver.

The varied experiences of the disciples are rich in information and encouragement for us.

We follow them to mountain heights, across the plains and over the waters in the company of their Lord and ours. The discerning eye of the student of Scripture must be alert to observe how at points, as the mother eagle is said to push her young birds from the nest to exercise their wings, the Master sought to strengthen their pinions of faith.

The fearful storms, sudden and unexpected, the hungry throngs and no bread, the long hours of toil and no catch-these and many like experiences were designed to strengthen the sinews of faith and to produce stalwarts for conquests in after years.

But now, let us witness how the Master met a maritime menace, and how the fever of fear was overcome by the Great Physician.

The Sudden Storm

It was evening, and the lengthening shadows were being retarded by the delaying action of the fading rays in the afterglow of the setting sun. “Let us pass over unto the other side” (Mark 4:35), advised the Master, following a day of instruction and counsel.

Obedient to His Word, the disciples launched out on what was to prove a most eventful voyage, so symbolical of life as you and I meet it with its inevitable vicissitudes. And we must not overlook a delightful suggestion found in the words, “and they took Him even as He was” (Mark 4:36).

How ill-content are so many in our day to take Him as He is. So many will not take Him as the divine Son of God, others will not take Him as the One who alone is able to save. Still others will not take Him as the One at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore (Psalms 16:11).

Oh, do take Him as the satisfying, sustaining, all-supplying Saviour and Lord, in Whom ye are complete (Colossians 2:10). THE CONTRARY WIND

“There arose a great storm of wind” (Mark 4:37).

The very terminology of the Inspired Record leads us to the conclusion that this was not an ordinary tempest. But how subtle is the wind, “Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth” (John 3:8).

They felt the gentle stir of an animated atmosphere against their weather-beaten cheeks. They saw the slight ripple of the erstwhile still waters in the lessening light of a fading day. Then the white caps began to appear and to multiply, as myriads of miniature fairies, dancing upon the watery surface. As though not content with child-play, the wind, in a sterner display, whipped the white caps into frenzied, dashing waves, growing by the moment in size and turbulence, attacking and tossing the boat of the disciples, even as a professional wrestler tries to overpower his opponent. It was a “great storm.”

The reader will call to mind that “contrary winds” is a term, aptly chosen by the Holy Spirit, to symbolize false doctrine, the dissemination of which is just as subtle as the wind which blows. It causes a little ripple in the peaceful confidence of the soul without too much notice or concern at first. Then the “white caps” of a growing instability begin to manifest themselves.

They are warning signals of a dangerous course in the life. If not corrected, they will inevitably eventuate in the waves of a restless attitude toward the clear and concise precepts of divine revelation.

Then the testimony capsizes in the waves of evident dissatisfaction with the way of the Lord, and one’s faith suffers shipwreck. Of course, winds will blow, but the Christian sailor’s ever-faithful Pilot says, “Let us pass over unto the other side.” He knew the storm would rage, but it is clear that He intended them to reach the haven safely. THE CONFRONTING WAVES This was a real experience. It has all the elements of vivid drama, but it was real. They were well out from the point of embarkation but still not in sight of the port of entry-and they were in the midst of a “Great Storm”. The wind, though strong enough to blow them off their course, was not the chief concern. It was the waves which filled them with terror -high, horrible, hard-striking waves which beat relentlessly against their little craft. Defensive measures were the only move of which these experienced sailors were capable, and even their collective effort was hopelessly weak in the midst of such powerful billows. As the contrary winds are symbolic of false doctrine, so the waves are indicative of troubles. “All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me,” the Psalmist lamented. His may have been high waves and rough billows, but they had not ALL gone over him. This is just a common illusion in the soul of the one going through deep waters of sickness, sorrow or disappointment. We become so occupied with our own case that we are prone to forget that others are in desperate straits as well.

What caused the boisterous waves? The wind, of course. And it is the contrary wind of false doctrine which accounts for the rough sailing for so many. One who is built up in that most holy faith through the pure truth of God’s Word will meet turbulent waters from time to time, but such an one has the comfort and confidence of the Captain within his barque Who furnishes grace and strength for the trials being met.

Nor are life's most grievous problems those of sickness or affliction. The hottest tears shed and the most distressful emotions experienced have been displayed by those who had erred from the way of righteousness and had fallen into shame and reproach. Their crafts were blown off the charted course by the contrary winds of doctrine, and the waves of bitterness, grief and remorse were but the disillusioning results. To reach the "other side" with the Lord necessitates a sweet and willing concurrence of our hearts with His holy desires. The Saddened Sailors

The abnormalcy of reactions on the part of the disciples must not eclipse for us the spiritual import of the record. The Holy Spirit reported this experience of the long ago, not merely for interesting reading, but for profitable consideration; and the logical sequence of matters makes for an integrated message of no mean proportions. The context gives us three points of simple development. First, the filling boat; second, the fearful minds; and, third, the faithless hearts: THE FILLING BOAT

It was a small craft in which the disciples were sailing, hardly sturdy enough to cope with such roughness, even as the individual, of which it so aptly speaks, is utterly defenseless in himself to meet the storms of life. And the waters will overflow. In the violence of the storm, the waves dashed with telling force against the tossing boat, and then began to leap over the sides as the intrusion of a most unwelcome guest.

The strenuous efforts of the sailors in bailing out the water was rapidly becoming a losing battle. The little vessel was beginning to fill. THE FEARFUL MINDS

It was evident to every sane individual that this present condition could not exist without disaster becoming inevitable. As we know human life, fear in such moments is the most logical reaction.

Fear is an accompaniment of sin, as was evidenced by the hiding of Adam and Eve following their expulsion from the Garden of Eden; and, since all have sinned, all are susceptible to fear.

Everywhere people fear trials and troubles. Few fear the consequences of sin, even when the portents of danger become increasingly evident in the handwriting on the walls of conscience. And fewer still fear God sufficiently to faithfully keep His commandments even though this is the whole duty of man. These sailors were terrified, as was proved by the first question which Jesus put to them, "Why are ye so fearful?" (Mark 4:40).

Perhaps the same inquiry comes to us in the varied storms of life which tend to distress our minds and disturb our souls. THE FAITHLESS HEARTS That fear paralyzes energy is a fact which no one would seriously question, but do we realize that fear destroys faith? Such was the case with the disciples.

We might, be disposed to feel that they had ample reason to become completely undone, but the Master would not agree with us. He demanded, and that pointedly, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" Fear and faith do not co-exist in the heart. Isaiah said, "I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2).

The Psalmist advanced similar testimony. The disciples were afraid but did not trust, and in this respect we bear a resemblance to them. As we travel life's seas it is eminently essential that we become spiritually equipped to face any eventuality which may arise. His promise is that the waters shall not overflow. We must believe him. Someone has said, "If I could see as He sees, I

would not be afraid. I cannot see as He sees, but I can hear what He says. And He says, ‘Be not afraid’.” The Sleeping Saviour

“And he (Jesus) was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow” (Mark 4:38).

Can the reader conceive of a ship sinking when the Mighty Maker of land and sea was on board? It was He who had said, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11).

Yet, the reader can imagine how the disciples, in adversity, can sadly overlook the fact that the Saviour is near at hand. We so readily turn to bailing out the water instead of believing in His power to stay the waves.

HE HEARD THEIR CALL

“He that keepeth thee will not slumber” (Psalms 121:3).

But the Saviour was sleeping. The text so declares. Is this a contradiction? No, we are assured that the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself in the Inspired Record. Here is one of the mysteries of His deity. The fact remains, asleep or not asleep, He always hears the supplications of His people.

He heard them when they called. And what an outburst it was! Characterized by desperation and disbelief, they cried aloud, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?”

“Does Jesus care when our heart is pained Too deeply for mirth and song,

And the burdens press and the cares distress And the day grows weary and long?

Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares His heart is touched with my grief.” The question which naturally arises is, Why did they not call Him sooner?

Why do we delay our heart supplications until we have exhausted every human scheme to effect relief of our problems? Of course He cared. Has not the Holy Spirit said, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

It seems to become us to go to great ends to prove our own helpless inability, and then, with faithless hearts, blame the Lord for not doing something about our case. But we should never for a moment entertain the thought that He does not care. One look at Calvary should forever cure this subtle weakness. One look at Calvary and hearts become atune with the melody, “No one ever cared for me like Jesus.”

Our blessed Lord left the ivory palaces for a world of sin, sorrow and shame because He cared for us.

- He Who was rich became poor because He cared for us.

- He turned from heavenly praise of the seraphim to hear the jeers and taunts of blasphemous men because He cared for us.

- He trekked the shore of Galilee with no place to lay his head because He cared for us.

- He voluntarily endured not one but a thousand deaths on the old rugged cross with its unspeakable shame and reproach because He cared for us.

- He graciously and freely supplies us with celestial resources for every daily need because He cares for us.

He tenderly invites us to come unto His throne, there to place our supplications for dispensing grace to help in the nick of time, because He cares for us. He is now, through love, interceding unceasingly at the throne of heaven in our behalf because He cares. In due course He will come with triumphant glory to evacuate His bride from this place of sin, sorrow, death and impending wrath, all because He loves us with an everlasting love.

HE HURRIED TO THEIR AID

No, they would not perish. Quickly he was at their side. He took over their case. The tide always turns when the Lord enters the picture. How wonderful that we may in any day cast all our care upon Him. How weird must have been the thought of perishing, and the angry waves gave prominence to the probability.

But what does it mean to perish?

Has anyone been able to lead us into a clear and full comprehension of what it involves? To be plunged into the watery deep is not, necessarily, to perish without hope. But even at that the thought was grim, and the disciples were terror stricken. Their resources had been pathetically depleted and desperation paints scenes only in drab colors. In rapid succession there flashed on the screen of their consciousness such impressions as home, loved ones, uncompleted tasks, pressing responsibilities, cherished ambitions . . . But now the Master stands by them.

There is something solemn, sobering and stabilizing about the fact of the Saviour's presence. "Go . . . and, lo, I am with you . . ." Is this not what He said in substance to the disciples as they launched forth? Had they forgotten? Not exactly, but, as is true with us, the tremendous import of the fact failed to grip them.

What they did in their panic they might have done in the peace of an asserting assurance - acknowledge His presence. When circumstances at last drove them to do what faith would have earlier prompted, their cry was a pathetic display of distrust, suspicion and irreverence. But how gracious is our Lord. We may blunder in the expression of our lips, but if it transmits the crying needs of our hearts, He so interprets the plea and rushes reinforcements when most needed. The Master came to their aid. The Surprising Surcease The storm was still raging. It would seem that the small craft could stand no more of such fierce battering. Nor were the sailors equal to more of such severe strain. This was the point of bitter extremity.

JESUS WHISPERED "PEACE"

TWO operations were performed by the Lord, one upon the sorrowing souls and the other upon the surface of the sea. "Who by his strength . . . stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, AND the tumult of the people." What did it really matter about the waves if the disciples' turbulent hearts were calmed?

An elderly Christian man of our acquaintance was rushed to the hospital for an emergency operation. The son, arriving just as the father was being wheeled to the operating room, inquired, “How are you, Dad?”

The father replied with quiet confidence, “Even though the storm is raging without, Son, there is always calmness when the Prince of Peace is in the vessel.”

This is what the disciples needed to know. This is what we, too, must learn. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

The peace which our Saviour gives;

- Is exclusive in its origin, for it is a peace which the world cannot give.

- Is exceptional in its character for it is not what the world speaks about, fights and dies for-an uncertain, unstable, unsatisfying something to grasp at but never to be sure the grip is firm and lasting.

No, it is something real, something restful, something refreshing. It is excellent in its exhilarating force for it is the assurance of forgiven sins, the confidence of a present salvation and the certainty of future glory. It is the joy of a bestowed victory, the knowledge of a new relationship and the satisfaction of a new life. It is second only to love in sweetness, in sound and in significance.

“When Jesus spoke peace to my soul,

He whispered ‘Thy faith makes thee whole’;

Full pardon I give, and now thou shalt live

With this wonderful peace in thy soul.”

JESUS SAID, “BE STILL”

He rebuked the wind and commanded the angry waves. There was an immediate response to the authority and power of His word. The marked contrast between the sudden stillness and the erstwhile confusion filled the disciples with great wonderment. In fact, “they feared exceedingly.”

A miracle had been performed before their eyes. Now, they would not perish. Their master had proved that He cared. If we may read their minds, it was their plan that He should help them bail out the water in their frantic effort to offset the vicious thrusts of the heaving waves. How true it is that “His ways are not our ways.”

Just what became of the “other little ships” (Mark 4:36), we are not told.

Our hearts should go out in pity to those who do not have the Saviour with them when called upon to go through the deep waters.

Experience has proved, and Scripture corroborates the fact, that our blessed Lord may speak peace to needy hearts without smoothing out the waves.

In the city of London, Ontario, the author was called upon to visit a Christian woman who, some twenty years previously, had become incurably crippled in an automobile accident. A description of her condition had been given but we found it to be much worse than we had anticipated. She was unable to move an arm, a limb or her head. Her mouth could be opened wide enough only to admit a small particle of food. Added to this was a violent, palsied tremor throughout her body. For twenty years she had been so afflicted.

An earnest attempt on our part to sympathize with her brought this immediate comment: “It’s all right; its all right. He has given me peace within.”

The Lord had spoken peace to her heart, but, for reasons to become clear when we know all things, He had not commanded the waves to be still. They continue to this writing to lash relentlessly against her little barque. The Sunny Shore

It is so common that it cannot be surprising how the Lord’s disciples allow the sudden squalls of life’s varying vicissitudes to obscure the goal on which He has commanded them to fix their eyes. For the time, these followers in the long ago had lost sight of the other shore toward which they had started. They were consumed with their confronting problem and unconscious of His contravening power.

But now the prow of the ship is cutting its course through the still waters. Progress is resumed. The value of the lesson learned cannot be comprehended fully.

THEY CROSSED THE SEA

HOW simply the narrative continues in the next chapter.

“And they came over unto the other side” (Mark 5:1).

His beginning word assured them of their destination. If our faith were but more simple we should take Him at His word.

Regardless of the storms which we may meet, we must be assured that we shall reach the other side. Satan would gleefully stir up a storm any time if he could thereby turn our eyes from heaven-the Homeland of the Christian. He would destroy our hope and disturb our course.

Amid the illuminating facts of the Sacred Page, this diabolical stratagem must never become effective against us. The day will come, as come it must, when the last stroke is made, the oars put in place and our little barque will dock at the port of glory before the radiant beauty of our blessed Lord.

JESUS WAS WITH THEM ALL THE WAY

“Earthly friends may prove untrue,

Doubts and fears assail.

One still loves and cares for you.

Jesus never fails!”

Those weary and forlorn sailors found this to be gloriously true.

- He might have disowned them for questioning His concern for them, but He didn't.

- He might have refused to help because they had delayed so long to acknowledge His presence, but He didn't.

- He might have said, "I will step to the other shore. You cope with the storm as best as you can," but He didn't.

Nor will He forsake us in the way. He is a present help in trouble and a constant joy in prosperity.

When the children of Israel were so miraculously delivered to the other side of the Red Sea, Moses and his people sang, "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them IN THY STRENGTH unto thy holy habitation" (Exodus 15:13).

This is precisely what He is doing for all the redeemed. "I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will receive you unto Myself." This is "the other side" for the believer and this is His guarantee of a safe and certain arrival at his holy destination.

The meaning of "preparation" is to get or make ready, to appoint, to be fixed, to direct or establish, to fit or qualify.

This is our Saviour's present undertaking. The motive, manner and method are respectively, His love, labour and loyalty. And what shall we say about the magnitude and the magnificence of His preparations? Simply this, never let a storm in life, regardless of its proportions, eclipse the inexplicable grandeur of that sunlit shore which awaits every justified soul, radiantly illuminated by the Lamb Who is the light thereof.

"And they came over unto the other side"

~ end of chapter 1 ~

Chapter 50

03.02 Behind The Scene In The Prodigal's Life

CHAPTER TWO BEHIND THE SCENE IN THE PRODIGAL'S LIFE "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15:18). THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON IS One of the most familiar of all the parables. The characters step out on the stage of divine Revelation in a sprightly manner, act their several parts with a never-to-be-forgotten naturalness and then leave themselves on the screen of our memories as though the curtain had never fallen upon the scene. It is more than a narrative; it is a dramatized lesson of deep spiritual import for youth and adulthood alike. There are many approaches to the text and many applications for the message.

Among the numerous exegetical highlights, we observe the impatience of the son, the impartiality of the father, the impiety of the wanderer, the impression of home, the imperishability of paternal love, the imprudence of the brother and the importance of the return. Then, focusing the spotlight more definitely upon the prodigal himself, our attention is drawn to his demand, his departure, his downfall, his desperation, his desecration, his desire and his decision.

A closer examination reveals some telling facts.

- His vision was faulty because his outlook was bad;

- His judgment was overpowered because the wrong decision was made;

- His planning was poor because he spent all without profitable investment;

- His resourcefulness was low because he could not command much in the way of employment;

- His standing was lost because he joined himself with foreigners;

- His plight was desperate because he was in want;

- His pride was deflated because he tended the swine;

- His memory was good because he thought of home;

- His repentance was real because he returned humbly.

Going behind the scene in the life of this younger son, several pertinent facts are discoverable.

First, the rampage of an urge;

Second, the road of the wayward;

Third, the remorse of the wanderer;

Fourth, the return of the penitent. The Rampage of an Urge THE URGE WAS CAUSED BY AN ALLUREMENT The glitter of false values has a dimming effect upon the spiritual vision, and if the germ of discontent has found lodgment in one's heart, ever so small a diverting attraction may seem like a hearty welcome to the out-reaching desires. Foreign pastures always seem greener to

dissatisfied emotions. The reports of the “far country” had been incubating in this young son’s mind for some time. It was the answer to his Utopian dream. There was wealth; there was opportunity; there was assured success, so he thought. If his older brother wanted to remain at home, that was his affair, but he, himself, would launch out. His daily tasks grew dull and irksome; his home became unattractive; his father seemed too rigid, too exacting; his whole emotional life was fast becoming unsettled. Some of his friends had set out for the “far country”. They had courage to make the break. They had been famously successful in their venture. He would have courage, too. He would also make good. The urge was constantly present. THE URGE WAS ENCOURAGED BY INSISTENCE As a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

It was evident that this young man’s interests were not in his home and in his father’s vineyards. He was careless in his actions and irritable in his attitudes. Both the mother and father spent sleepless nights in parental consultation and prayer supplication regarding him. No matter how often or how much his parents sought to dissuade him, it was of no avail. He insisted that the die was cast. His reasons for going were not well founded, and his people knew this, but he insisted.

This case finds its analogy in the spiritual realm. Indeed, that is why the Saviour advanced the parable, but how true to experience is the point at hand. One becomes dissatisfied with the things of Christ. The discontent grows.

The church is not what it ought to be, such an one reasons;

- The people are no longer friendly;

- The preacher is inconsiderate;

- The doctrinal position of the church is too rigid;

- The viewpoint is too narrow.

But the “far country” (it has everything to supply happiness, prestige and opportunity.

The pastor and the elders struggle to overcome these objections, but to no avail. The insistence of the urge to explore the recommendations of others, contrary to the Word of Truth, becomes overpowering and self-justifying. It is a struggle for self-gratification. Then the urge begins to master the thoughts. THE URGE WAS SUPPORTED BY PREMEDITATION

“And not many days after . . . he took his journey” (Luke 15:13).

The decision had been made-wise or otherwise, it had been made. All that had held him this long was the advancement of the wherewithal to venture forth-his part of the estate. Many forces had been at work. He was ill-advised by those who should have known better; he was spurred on by ill-adopted associates. Finally, sufficient boldness was developed to wage a break. He knew it would pierce his mother’s heart. He knew, too, that his father had cherished great expectations for him, but “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes” (Proverbs 12:15).

His approach was not curt, but it was resolute. “Father,” he said, “give me the share of the property that is coming to me.” The father deemed it best, under the circumstances, to acquiesce. The Road of the Wayward THE ROAD OF THE WAYWARD IS EASY TO ENTER

It is quite likely that there were tears in another home as well. These ventures usually solicit company. To others, such matters are but news items; to parents they are heart-rending experiences. In the spiritual realm, they are grievous to the Holy Spirit. Concerning those who become wayward, the Lord once declared, “Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle” (Jeremiah 8:6).

The imagery is most expressive. As the steed is unaware of the danger involved, and increases its pace toward the mouth of the cannon as the spurs are pressed into its body, even so the wayward person presses on, utterly impervious to the inevitable consequences of disobedience.

Yes, it is easy to enter the way of spiritual diversion. One may drift into it. As soon as one puts up the oars of Christian activity and godly exercise, one’s little craft is carried into the current of unbelief, indifference and unconcern. THE ROAD OF THE WAYWARD IS DIFFICULT TO DESERT

It is easier to fall than to rise. One descends through relaxation; one ascends by determination. But determination in spiritual ventures is not very impressive apart from proffered and appropriated divine assistance.

It is this assistance which a backslider is loath to accept.

The reason is obvious. Pride characterized the prodigal’s departure but humility was prerequisite to his reinstatement. He was boastful in taking his leave; he must needs be broken in effecting his return, and pride does not give way too readily. Pride would rather languish in the throes of bitter disillusionment than bend in the acknowledgment of its blunder.

Those whom Satan draws into the snares of his seductive scheming will weep forever without his sympathy. He laughs at their anguish and delights in their disasters. He revels in the woes of those whom he weakens. He deceives but never relieves. His treatment of those who trust him is epitomized in the lines of a simple verse:

“Lady Golden Rod is swaying

In the soft September air;

She’s a princess fair I’m claiming,

With a crown of gold to wear.

“Autumn soon will sad deceive her,

He will set her forth to scorn;

He will steal her gold and leave her

Just a beggar made forlorn.”

How long the younger son wandered away from home is not stated. That is incidental to the picture. It seemed longer than it really was, both to himself and to those at home. One thing can be presumed with safety- he might have started back sooner. The last hindrance the Devil will throw in the course of a wanderer is that decision-preventing monster, Procrastination. When one foot is

extricated from the quicksand of doubt and delay he pushes it back in until another day. Procrastination is the thief not only of time but of eternity. THE ROAD OF THE WAYWARD IS CERTAIN OF FAILURE The prodigal's rush for wealth plunged him into want. He had nothing to record for his adventure that was elevating or encouraging, and, after his return, he never recommended that any other young fellow should go and do likewise. His unhesitating advice would have been:

"Appreciate a good thing while you have it. Foreign pastures are not as green as they appear."

It has been aptly stated that "there is no success outside the will of God and there is no failure within." Blind unbelief and bold indifference try to controvert this statement, and the highways of life are lined with those who are trying to run away from God. Witness the sad plight of Jonah. How successful was he while on a divergent path? To move contrary to the will of God is, in effect, to point one's finger in the face of the Most High, saying, "Thy way is neither right nor desirable. I will devise my own course." At once the blessing of the Lord is prevented and the life becomes shallow and blighted. Whatever may be the expressed opinions of observers, such an one is empty and useless. The Remorse of the Wanderer THE WANDERER WAS OUT OF FUNDS AND WITHOUT COUNSEL A tender, loving mother may have been pining, "Where is my wandering boy tonight?" But little did those in that otherwise happy household dream that destitution had befallen him who so lately inherited his portion of the estate.

He squandered his money. It went to the very last penny. Yes, it was all gone and his dream had not come true. The world had not fallen at his feet; the fortunes of life had not come under his control; the positions of prestige had mockingly eluded his vain graspings; and where was he? Simply and undeniably in an impecunious state of physical bankruptcy. It was a grim reality to face. Where were his counsellors? Where were those vociferous creatures who had so strongly urged him on? He was alone- alone to grieve; alone to lament.

If only the spiritual application of this revealing truth could be impressed upon weak, careless Christians, there would be fewer thronging the course of antichristian activity and association.

- No one can feel the grip of poverty more than one who has experienced a sufficiency of all things.

- No one could be more bewildered than the one who has enjoyed the directive wisdom of the Wonderful Counsellor. THE WANDERER WAS OUT OF FOOD AND WITHOUT COMFORT

Feeding the swine would also be but incidental to the story if it did not furnish us with a belated appreciation on the part of the younger son concerning the provisions of his father's house.

Of all creatures, perhaps none is more ravenous than hogs. They are, seemingly, always hungry. In this respect, the prodigal sustained a likeness to them. The pangs of inward need were becoming increasingly poignant. The food he was giving them was, as is usually true, the leftovers from tables well furnished. This reminded the hungry lad of the table back home which was always heavily laden with delectable and nourishing things. "How many hired servants of my father's," he reminded himself, "have bread enough and to spare" (Luke 15:17).

Then, with something of an emotional convulsion, bordering on self-pity, he moaned, "And I perish with hunger."

As grim as was the very thought, it was good for him. It was good for him that the extreme cost of a wayward course should be silhouetted against a gloomy and unpromising horizon, there to stare him in the face and say, “You chose it. You have no one to blame but yourself.”

This is all so illustrative of the emptiness and drabness of a backslider.

Worldly hilarity cannot satisfy the heart; sinful escapades cannot feed the soul; and hunger will assert itself. Physically, it makes the strongest assertion of all dominant urges.

In the spiritual realm hunger asserts itself as well, but the cry of the soul for nourishment is so persistently disregarded that there results only the emaciated form (morphosis) of godliness without the comfort of sacred communion and the refreshment of heavenly bestowments. It is difficult to conceive how one can taste the rich, good things of the Lord and then attempt to subsist on the husks of the world. Yet the Israelites hankered after Pharaoh’s bill-of-fare when a table of good things was set for them by the hand of God in the wilderness. THE WANDERER WAS OUT OF FELLOWSHIP AND WITHOUT FRIENDS When the secular supports go, as go they will amid life’s varied and inevitable vicissitudes, the burden of grief can be greatly alleviated in the amiable atmosphere of cherished loved ones and trusted friends. But when a fellow is on foreign soil where his feelings are not respected and where sentiment finds no affinity, it is a smothering heaviness which begins to settle down upon his soul.

It is that kind of aloneness which has something of the sting of death in its bitterness. It cools the blood, slows down the heartbeat, dulls the initiative and bends the soul in a posture which is difficult to straighten. This is where the prodigal found himself. “No man gave unto him” (Luke 15:16 b).

The theme of every backslider’s heart, though unexpressed, cannot but be, “Oh, how tedious and tasteless the hours when Jesus no longer I see.”

- Departure from Him is a weird sojourn in the dark;

- Absence from Him (practically) extracts the sweetness out of life’s more pleasant experiences;

- Distance from Him imposes a tediousness resultant from the lack of His precious rest.

This is what the Holy Spirit would have us see as our loss, were we through disobedience to turn into a wayward course. The prodigal’s heart was wrung with desperation and remorse. The Return of the Penitent MEMORY HAD OPENED A DOOR When memory began to operate, hope began to revive. He lost sight of the swine and moved in thought back over the divergent and disappointing path which he had so unwisely trodden, and felt, for the first time in ever so long, a sense of joy and happiness in an imaginary visit to the old homestead.

There was Mother, a few more wrinkles in her sweet face, and Dad a bit weary in his pace. There was the home with all its warmth and welcome. What could with this compare? How foolish of any one to leave all this for the hazards of an uncharted course, infested with lurking dangers for such unseasoned travelers as himself. Yes, he remembered better days.

This was the first step in the right direction.

Memory is essential, too, in spiritual rehabilitation. “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen,” the precious Saviour pleads. If one has been born into the household of faith and knows the sweet joys of the family of God, and has, against the counsel of the Father, chosen a way that is not good, memory must operate to start that one back. If he cannot remember something richer, fuller, sweeter, deeper, in the Father’s house, and is still satisfied with his wayward course, then there is no strong incentive for his return. When the prodigal looked back through the door of memory, he opened to his weary soul and downcast heart the first warm rays of hope in many a day.

HUMILITY WAS PERMITTED TO DEVELOP

He would go back entirely free of pride and haughtiness-those despicable traits which were so evident at his departure.

- He would confess that he had sinned against heaven and his father.

- He would plead unworthiness to be called a son.

- He would request only the favour of being an hired servant.

He was in earnest. He could not do otherwise under the circumstances. He had failed. He knew the bitterness of terrible defeat. He would pay the price. He still possessed manhood, and now it was showing something of its long ignored strength. He would overlook the taunts and jeers of the other hired servants and any unfavorable attitude his brother might manifest. It would be hard, but not so hard as his present plight.

If such humility were afforded some opportunity to develop in the countless disobedient children of God, what a revival of unprecedented proportions would ensue! What a strengthening of the poor, faltering testimony of the Church! It would soften the hardened hearts and relax rebellious souls so the Great Potter could mould the clay and make it again to please Him-a vessel unto honour. It would bring the much-needed and greatly longed-for times of refreshing from out of His presence.

DETERMINATION TOOK CONTROL

“I will arise and go!” (Luke 15:18)

All the other recorded parts of his meditation may have been inaudible, but surely these words were spoken aloud-spoken with emphasized resoluteness. He meant to act. This was later proved to be true. He did just that. Much like faith and repentance in their complementary and simultaneous operation, memory, humility and determination comingled to produce an end that caused a whole household to rejoice and a sinning son to rhapsodize in a welcome that was overwhelming. The best robe, the signet ring, the shoes and the fatted calf were subordinate details in contrast to the embrace and kiss of the father. His want gave way to welcome; his humility faded into happiness and his loneliness was lost in the love and light and liberty of home.

The context furnishes the application. “I say unto you,” the Lord Jesus informed, “that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth . . . there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7; Luke 15:10).

There are not two different “joys” in this quotation. It is one and the same joy, but it is first with the Father and then spreads to the legions of angels-and why? As the father ran compassionately to meet the son and preceded the household in the delight of his return, to be followed by the more general celebration, even so, it seems that our Father in heaven hurries to welcome the repentant wanderer who arises to return. Then all heaven shares the gladness.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

03.03 The Stranger In The Temple

CHAPTER THREE THE STRANGER IN THE TEMPLE

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). THE ANIMATED SURPRISE of the Apostle in our text was not due to the lack of intellectual awareness on the part of the Corinthian believers, but to the absence of experiential assurance. It was not theoretical ignorance which concerned him, but a practical deficiency.

Second only to the matchless miracle of the incarnation of Christ is the descent of Deity to tabernacle in the bodily tents of men and women, there to cohabit with the spirits of born again people. In the former operation, God was providing the rich and abundant gift of divine life; in the latter, He is proffering the superabundant supplies of infinite grace. Indifference to the provisions of the Saviour results in a catastrophic hopelessness, while inattention to the presence of the Spirit issues in colossal helplessness.

In a parabolic explanation of human reactions to divine agents, the Lord Jesus related how a proprietor leased his vineyard to tillers (Matthew 21:33). When the vintage time approached, the owner sought his share. The lessees took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned the third. Others were sent and received like treatment. Finally he sent his son, believing they would honour him; but when the workers saw the son, they said, “Come, let us kill him and get hold of his inheritance.”

How pictorially true this was of the prophets who were stoned and beaten and sawn asunder, and of the Father’s own Son who was nailed by wicked hands to the cruel cross. We assure ourselves that we never would have participated in such evil deeds. Would we have plucked the beard from His blessed face or crushed the festering thorns upon His brow? Would we have offered him vinegar and gall to drink? Would we have joined with the stampeding bulls of Bashan at the base of the cross to hurl blasphemous jeers and taunts at the suffering Saviour? Even the thought is repulsive.

Yet, if it could be proved that our treatment of the Spirit falls into the same category as that which befell the Saviour, it would be a sad and serious indictment.

One thing ought to register in our minds indelibly. The Holy Spirit is none-the-less God than was the precious Saviour of men. Even as the Lord Jesus was intent upon doing the will of the Father and of finishing His work, just so is the blessed Holy Spirit desirous of pursuing His ministry to its fruition. But what did He come to do? To delineate definite reasons for His indwelling the believer should make it decidedly easy for us to determine whether or not He is the stranger in the temple. The Holy Spirit Takes Up His Abode in the Body of the Believer

to Make Objective Truth an Inward Reality No one can experience the spiritual impact of Truth or enjoy its vitality until the Divine Teacher introduces one to its unfathomable depths and its

incalculable worth. “The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11).

It is, therefore, the contact of God’s Spirit with man’s which paves the way for an intelligent appreciation and an effectual appropriation of the transforming revelations of the Infinite. It becomes the Spirit to give dignity to the dialect of heaven; it behooves the saint to grant Him the opportunity. But how is this ministration accomplished by the Divine Indweller? THE HOLY SPIRIT POINTS OUT THE WAY

“He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

He is One who shows the way -a conductor. A guide is necessary when the way is not known, or when immensity or complexity (or both) characterizes the objective to be surveyed. And where can the human mind discover a broader, more profound field of investigation? The Book of books is a mine of wealth incomputable, an ocean of wisdom unfathomable, and a sphere of wonder incomparable. Because He searches the deep things of God, and is Himself omniscient, the gracious Holy Spirit can “paraclete” us into the highways of prophecy, the boulevards of doctrine, the avenues of inspiration and the bypaths of biography.

With His patient, potent assistance, one has the blessed privilege of ascending the mountain - climbs to the fastnesses of revealed grandeur, where the azure blue of heavenly atmosphere suffuses one with the glory of the Divine Presence. THE HOLY SPIRIT PROVIDES THE ABILITY In that intimate, affectionate letter of the Father to His little children, He states; “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you” (1 John 2:27).

The anointing (“chrism”) of the Spirit is an holy endowment to furnish one with qualities to grasp the Truth-the faculties which facilitate an appropriation of Scripture. How amazingly wonderful is the completeness of divine equipment for the believer. Surely the man of God is fully furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:17). No detail is overlooked; hence no excuse exists for our lack of Bible knowledge. The work of the Holy Spirit as guide is not for the purpose of taking us on an excursion. No, it is not an excursion at all; it is an incursion-He guides into all truth. Nor is it for pastime, but rather for profit. The reason the Lord Jesus could not sin is that He had no affinity for sin (John 14:30) - Satan had nothing in Him. The reason we can know the Truth of God is because it has something in us, even the Author. He has an affinity for the Word, and, being resident in us (the believers) reaches out for its quickening, constraining and commanding force. In this way, and through this medium, we are furnished with the pervasive refreshment and the practical potency of the living qualities of divine Truth. THE HOLY SPIRIT PROMOTES THE UNDERSTANDING

Paul, by divine unction, sounded an important note when He insisted that “the things of the Spirit of God . . . are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Without the help of the Spirit, men may see the words and read the statements of Scripture; they may know the grammar and the rhetoric, but it is more than the grammatical and the rhetorical principles we want. His words are spirit and His words are life. How can we get the spirit or the vitality of the divine statements apart from the heaven-sent Teacher?

The blind man of Bethsaida said, upon the restoration of his sight, “I see men as trees walking” (Mark 8:24). He could detect objects but could only differentiate between men and trees because

of human mobility. This is not clear discernment.

When it comes to an heart appreciation of the mind of Christ as revealed in His Word, doubtless many of God's dear people only see "men as trees walking." This pathetic condition ought not to exist since the Spirit dwells within. Mark it well, if His presence is unrecognized, then are our eyes unopened, our minds unaffected, our hearts unstirred and our feet unfed. In all candid truthfulness, is the Holy Spirit not the stranger in the temple? The Holy Spirit Takes Up His Abode in the Body of the Believer

to Exalt Christ in the Life

We ought to tread softly when we venture into the attributes and operations of the Holy Godhead. Yet, it is a granted privilege, not too eminently appreciated by many believers, that we may know something of the very precious desires of the Infinite. For instance, the Holy Spirit came, not to speak of Himself (John 16:13), but to take the things of Christ and make them plain to us; and why? Need we be in doubt a moment? He desires to exalt the Son in whom the Father is well pleased. How can He accomplish this end if not through the believer in whom He abides? The sobering fact is, that the believer may either help or hinder this deep desire of the Spirit of God.

What do we mean by the exaltation of Christ from the human point of view? It is that state or quality in the believer which willingly and wholeheartedly ascribes unto the Lord His rightful place in the daily life as regards adoration, authority and acknowledged accomplishment. Since without divine assistance we are utterly unable to do anything (John 15:5), it ought to be admitted by any discerning mind that this sacred emphasis in the Christian will be sadly lacking if the presence and power of the Spirit are not recognized in the life. TO EXALT CHRIST IS TO REVEAL ADORATION IN OUR ATTITUDES

Love has a language all its own. It need not be vocal to be vital. Indeed there may be expression without experience. One may sing lustily, "My Jesus, I love Thee; I know Thou art mine" without the least stirring of the deeper emotions. Perhaps this is but one illustration of the "vain repetition of words" against which our Saviour warned (Matthew 6:7).

It is ever inspiring to hear people sing, "Love the world through me, Lord," but this holy desire will fall short of fulfillment unless we allow the Spirit to love the Lord through us. Love not only begets love, but He Who is love longs for affection. Surely the Holy Spirit strives to impress this fact upon our spirits and awaits, as the Royal Resident within, to encourage the flow of our evermore pure and changeless affection toward the heart that bled and broke for us.

TO EXALT CHRIST IS TO RESPECT HIS AUTHORITY FOR OUR ACTIONS

What is servant obedience but an humble, volitional resignation to the Sovereign Voice. It is a sweet blending of our confidence, trustfulness and assurance, respectfully, in His claims, directions and wisdom. It is the suing of the soul for that coveted status of a good man whose "steps are ordered by the Lord" (Psalms 37:23).

Respecting the authority of Christ in any and all of our dedicated endeavors is giving precedence and transcendence to His holy will. It is our attestation to the rightness of His way and our confession that it is the only way, at least for us. It is the joy of knowing that we are under omniscient direction, hence being advanced in the proper course.

It involves a forfeiture of all personal preference and a refusal of all contra-persuasion, giving the Lord an absolute priority in the life. Without the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, indifference, obstinacy and rebellion would, in varying degrees, begin to characterize the actions of God's people. Indeed, this is precisely what is developing because the Spirit of God is unrecognized generally as the present Indweller of the believer. TO EXALT CHRIST IS TO REVEL IN THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

More than three thousand years have faded into history since General Moses and his wearied soldiers were miraculously snatched from the pursuing horsemen of Egypt and delivered joyfully on the opposite side of the Red Sea. Yet, his song of rejoicing is just as stirring and just as inspiring as though it were the keynote of a present-day victory celebration. Why? The living qualities of the Spirit-preserved Word, of course, make this true, but apart from this fact, Moses had the right perspective.

One of the highest notes which he struck in his song of redemption was, "I will sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously" (Exodus 15:1).

No room here for self-glorification, no basis for boasting. In fact, there was no disposition to indulge in either.

- It was by no clever military maneuver the Israelites escaped by the skin of their teeth.

- It was not human ingenuity that opened the channel through the sea.

- It was not the prowess of man which wrought the decisive defeat of this preponderant foe.

No, the triumph was the Lord's. Moses extolled the Most High for what He had done. He said: "I will exalt the Lord."

- Only the Holy Spirit can give us the right perspective.

- Only the Spirit can stimulate our hearts to praise Him who alone is worthy.

- Only He can help us to celebrate the Name of our Mighty Conqueror.

- It was not our moral development which brought us salvation.

- It was not our excellent training which effected the new birth.

- It was not our careful deportment which wrote our names in the Lamb's Book of Life.

- It was not our beneficent character or our phi9lanthropic deeds which made us heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

No, pre-figured by the flight of the Israelites, we were hemmed in, cut off and doomed to die; then a Strong Arm intervened. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for us. It was His triumph.

Of course, we enjoy it, and will continue to enjoy it increasingly world without end, but it was His triumph. He won the fight; He defeated the foe; He planted our feet on victory ground. The Holy Spirit is ever desirous of helping us to revel in our Lord's accomplishments for us. The question is, do we exalt the Lord?

If not, there's a stranger in the temple. The Holy Spirit Takes Up His Abode in the Body of the Believer

to Attest Our Relationship to God

Steal up to the side of the Apostle Paul and ask him seriously how we may know that we are vitally related to the Infinite. Without hesitation, the beloved servant of the Lord would answer, "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

Blind unbelief and careless inattention to Truth will complicate the clear profundity of this heaven-sent assurance. What is the witness of the Spirit? Simply what this verse states-nothing added, nothing subtracted. It is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. Whether we understand it or not, He pursues it. Whether we appreciate it or not, He performs it. Whether we acknowledge it or not, He promotes it. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

His is an unchangeable faithfulness.

To witness is to attest the truth of a person, place or thing. The Greek word in this instance (summartureo) means "to witness with". Thus, the Holy Spirit takes up His abode within our bodies to witness with our spirits. It is a communication of confidence to the children of the King. Consider what this means under certain circumstances. THE SPIRIT BEARS WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT IN MOMENTS OF DOUBT AND DISCOURAGEMENT

Few of God's people, down through the eras of time, have sought to run with patience the race before them without being crowded off the course by handicaps apparently too high to hurdle. Few of God's people have basked in the sun-lit glow of continual victory without being forced at some time into the shadows. Someone has suggested that discouragement is the Devil's darning needle which he employs promiscuously to prick unsuspecting folk.

Whatever imagery we may advance to characterize this rather effective stratagem of Satan, observe the meaning and value of the Spirit's witnessing ministry at such a time. To our spirit He whispers, "You are a child of God." Should that not be helpful? It will be helpful if we are conscious of His presence and witness within. If we are not so conscious, there's a stranger in the temple. THE SPIRIT BEARS WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT IN THE HOUR OF TEMPTATION The blessed Indweller stands guard for every emergency. He wants us to commit our case to Him always. He can outwit Satan. Besides, it is His battle and not ours (2 Chronicles 20:15). And when the pitfalls are digged and the collaborating cohorts of evil seek subtly to entice the Christian the Divine Witness works with his spirit. He whispers, "Thou art a child of God."

Is that not sufficient?

"What more can He say

Than to you He hath said;

To you who for refuge

To Jesus have fled?" This ought to be enough. If, in his cunning craftiness, Satan has for the time blinded the believer's mind to his oneness with the Father above, the faithful Holy Spirit is there, even within, to remind him that He is God's dear child. Such a reminder should be enough to

enable him to detect the danger, detest the temptation and depart from the tempter.

Jesus one day said to dear old lovable Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee . . . but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not” (Luke 22:31).

This undergirding support is our constant blessing through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. If, in the hour of temptation, we do not hear the witness of the Spirit, then there is a stranger in the temple. THE SPIRIT BEARS WITNESS WITH OUR SPIRIT IN THE DAY OF SORROW

Prior to our Lord’s glorious ascension, He sought to encourage His disciples by saying, “It is expedient for you that I go away” (John 16:7).

Has the reader ever seriously sought reasons why His departure was to our advantage? If not, here is a precious one. He went to send the Comforter to us. And He is come! He abides with tender graciousness within.

When the severe and merciless strokes of sorrow cut into the quick of our innermost being, and the heart is rent by the blasts of bereavement’s stinging blows, ah, then, the heaven-sent Comforter is there to succour. He is there to whisper, “Thou art God’s dear child.”

- This means we need not sorrow as others who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

- This means His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

- It means that, as our day, so shall our strength be (Deuteronomy 33:25).

If, in the hour of sorrow, you are not conscious of the Comforter’s consoling presence, then there is a stranger in the temple. The Holy Spirit Takes Up His Abode in the Body of the Believer

to Promote Communion at the Throne of Grace

If the Spirit’s ministry in its entirety were not essential and indispensable, we might, at times, contend that we could fare just as well without certain phases of His divine operations. This, however, could never be said by any discerning person with regard to His part in the sacred exercise of prayer. And let us not disagree with the Holy Spirit’s judgment when He tells us that our inability to pray as we ought is the paramount infirmity of our Christian experience. THE HOLY SPIRIT FURNISHES INTELLIGENCE REGARDING OUR PRAYER NEEDS No dilemma could be so disconcerting as being weighted down with inward burdens and not knowing the what or how in coming before the Throne of Grace. Yet this is decidedly and statedly our weakness. “We know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26).

Here again the Divine Indweller rushes to our aid and meets our need.

- We know not, but He knows.

- He knows whereof we have need even before we ask.

- He knows the kind and extent.

- He knows the degree of urgency.

- He knows the neglect which the pressing need may suffer.

There He is within, just when we need Him. He is there to detect and direct; to prompt and promote. He makes heavenly help most inviting to the saint who learns the plague of his own heart. THE HOLY SPIRIT CLOTHES OUR INEXPRESSIBLE SUPPLICATIONS WITH UNUTTERABLE GROANINGS That is, “the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

When we get this far in such a solemn and sacred consideration, we have plunged ourselves into the fathomless depths of divine wonders. We have moved into the unspeakable, the incomprehensible, but not into the incredible.

This second part of the verse is but the progressive result of the first, and the Holy Spirit goes beyond our reach into the sublime stages of prayer operation. All true prayer originates from God. It is only our recognition of His presence and our resignation to His patient promotion which carries prayer into this inexpressible status. It is as though the Holy Spirit says, “You can trust Me where you cannot trace Me.” Then, he carries the interests of the yielded soul before the dispensing throne of Grace, there to have every need met in the sufficiency of an assured answer. What irreparable loss we must suffer when we treat this precious Prayer-Promoter as a stranger in the Temple. The Holy Spirit Takes Up His Abode in the Body of the Believer

to Establish a Divine Partnership

We cannot escape the fact that God uses men to fulfil His purpose. He has heavenly hosts innumerable, but He uses men.

- He could speak, and the world-creating force of His voice would cause men everywhere to fall tremblingly at His feet, but He uses men.

- He could manifest in the twinkling of an eye sufficient power to transform every hardened sinner on this terrestrial ball, but He uses men.

- He could send legions of scintillating angels to demonstrate the brightness of His glory, but He chooses men to declare the greatness of His grace.

The blueprints of Omniscience call for the Spirit of God to work through quickened mortals who have found His favour through faith. THE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT IS SUGGESTED In the generally-known and oft-repeated benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:13, the statement, “and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,” supplies us with a delightful thought.

The word translated “communion” (koy-nohn-ee-ah) is recorded as “partners” in Luke 5:10. “James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon.”

It is given also as “fellowship” and as “sharers with”. Thus, we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit in a practical way. We are sharers with Him in the dissemination of the Word of Life; we are partners in the work of the Lord. THE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SPIRIT IS STATED The reason Paul could not speak to the Corinthian believers as unto spiritual, was due to the fact that they were not spiritual (1 Corinthians 3:1).

They maintained the status of “babes in Christ.” Babes neither recognize nor assume responsibility. Thus it requires something of an object lesson to reach the matter at hand-an

illustrative approach consisting of a tiller, an irrigator and a harvester. Then the Apostle came to the point: “For we are labourers together with God” (2 Corinthians 3:9).

This is astounding information, but it is just as authoritative as it is astounding. We are linked with the Infinite in a practical procedure, and, of course, the Holy Spirit is in view. He is the Lord of the Harvest. He directs the operations. It is incumbent upon us to submit willingly to His gracious directions. Any indifference to His tender instructions is not only an offense to Deity but grievous in the extreme to the divine Administrator. Grief is an injury to love, and Paul definitely warned against this when he urged, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 4:30). THE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ESSENTIAL In its simplest form a partnership is said to exist when two persons offer their resources to accomplish a particular end, each contributing what the other lacks, that together they may be fitted for the pursuance of their common purpose.

But what do we have which the Holy Spirit does not have that He would deign to enter into such an unusual relationship with us?

- We do not have the knowledge, but He does.

- We do not have the wisdom, but He does.

- We do not have the power, but He does.

Then, what do we have which He does not possess? A body-just a body. He has no earthly body such as was prepared for the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 10:5), no feet to carry the message of redeeming love to lost men and women, no lips to deliver the sweetest invitation heaven can offer, no hand to place tenderly upon the shoulder of a weary, sin-worn man who thinks no one cares for his soul.

Thus, the Holy Spirit wants your body; indeed, must have it if He, against the rush of time, is to translate hopeless ones from the kingdom of darkness and place them in the kingdom of God’s dear son. That is why Paul pleaded, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

- Have you refused His request?

- Have you hesitated and neglected to enter into such a hallowed relationship for so noble a purpose?

- Do you treat the Spirit as a stranger?

In an eastern town, two men of our acquaintance decided to enter the grocery business together, one furnishing the capital and the other contributing his experience and ability. Their names appeared in gold letters on the store window. Hardly a year later, one name was removed. Upon inquiry, we were informed tersely that the one “became tired of being treated as a silent partner.”

We cannot but wonder if this does not characterize our treatment of Him Who dwells within to establish with us a Divine Partnership. It is eminently essential that we seriously and solemnly consider the Holy Spirit’s relationship to us, that we remember His residence within, and that we recognize and respect His holy presence.

Is there a stranger in the temple?

~ end of chapter 3 ~

Chapter 52

03.04 The Secret Of Continual Triumph

CHAPTER FOUR THE SECRET OF CONTINUAL TRIUMPH “For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10). THE SUGGESTIVENESS OF OUR TEXT is exceeded only by the reality of its factual involvements.

- Faith has a foe to withstand;

- Faith has a fight to wage;

- Faith has a force to wield;

- Faith has a favour to win.

The foe of faith is a treacherous trickster who comes as an angel of light, robed in the glittering tinsel of deception. He is sinister in his designs and subtle in his deeds. His chief delight is to have the believer fall, if for no other reason than the fact that the Lord would have him stand.

The Apostle Peter introduces us to a practical line of thought which ought to prove profitable to the earnest child of God. The preface to his dissertation is helpfully encouraging. “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (1 Peter 1:2), he intreated.

It is an entreaty, for, while grace and peace are the bestowments of God, the multiplication of them is clearly the responsibility of the recipients. Grace is implanted power and peace is imbedded confidence. These are to be added together and multiplied by the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

No matter what aspect of the believer’s experience we may be emphasizing, we are invariably and of necessity brought face to face with the matter of Bible study, for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

So does instruction, and direction, and devotion. Knowledge of God and of Jesus as Lord is the multiplier of strength, stability and steadfastness-the sinews of sturdiness in every sincere servant of Christ. The Things of Heavenly Provision

“His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

Here we have a sweeping statement, the magnitude of which has never been calculated, the value of which can never be assayed. It has to do with the “All Things” of God’s provision. Observe closely that it does not state that He hath given unto us all things. No, there is a very important qualification. He has provided not only those things, but all those things that “pertain unto life and godliness.”

The life herein designated is later characterized or identified as “the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). All that this new life requires for growth and strength is supplied. Just as the natural life must have

nutriment and refreshment, sun and air, and just as the hand of Providence supplies these things, just so is the divine nature, acquired by grace through faith, supernaturally nourished and strengthened.

Nothing is lacking in the provisions to make strong and healthful every soul who takes shelter under the shadow of the wings of Him who preserveth man and beast (Psalms 36:6-7).

No excuse then for a believer to lapse into the weakness of spiritual anemia or the new man in Christ to wear a ghastly pallor. Within his reach and at his disposal are the “all things” to give him the blush of spiritual health and the stamina to bulwark him against the most pernicious thrusts of enemy forces. Whatever we need and whenever we need it, we have the authority of the Most High that it is ready for our appropriation and in abundant quantities.

And witness, also, the “all things” of divine provision are for godliness.

This has to do with the conduct of the new life, its operation and output. The same supply which sustains it in healthfulness is designed to support it in helpfulness, to promote it in paths of spiritual maturity and productiveness. This makes it possible for the new life to assert, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Php 4:13).

This is the source of propulsion in progress and the dynamic inherent in determination; and the reason for the breathtaking possibilities for every born again man or woman is that these provisions for life and godliness are “according to divine power” (2 Peter 1:3).

This by no means suggests limitation. On the contrary, the storehouse is inexhaustible, and the believer is in vital contact with the source of supply. The Things of Human Possession

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful . . .” (2 Peter 1:8).

Here is a vital consideration, a lesson to be learned upon our knees. The things of divine provision must be appropriated; they must be possessed. The difference between success and failure in Christian profession, and the difference between effectiveness and ineffectiveness in Christian procedure, is contingent upon the little conjunction if.

“If these things be in you,” the Apostle solemnly contended, thus introducing the matter of Christian accomplishment, “the whole of your Christian experience will be one of exceptional usefulness and abounding blessing.” The very thought incorporated in his earnest and inquiring statement prompts an immediate inventory of one’s life. Do we actually possess the things of divine provision? They are available to us, but do we have them? By what accurate and revealing gauge can we ascertain our possession of these things?

The text is very clear on this point. “He that lacketh these things” (2 Peter 1:9), which are divinely furnished to develop the Christian life and to order its course, is devoid of the evidences of an active faith. The exhortation is to the effect that “in your faith provide virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, kindness and love” (2 Peter 1:5-7, margin).

All these elevating characteristics issue from an appropriation of the divine gifts which are designed to equip and to energize the new nature acquired through the regenerating work of the

Holy Spirit. Dr. F. E. Marsh asks: “What is virtue but faith undaunted; what is knowledge but faith apprehending; what is temperance but faith overcoming; what is patience but faith untiring; what is godliness but faith imitating; what is kindness but faith in practice; what is love but faith at work?” *

* “Fully Furnished” - this book is also posted on our website at BaptistBibleBelievers.com.

Yes, the true status of any Christian can be readily determined through a moment of honest deductive consideration.

Then, there is a second aspect to the believer’s appropriation of the divine provisions. There is a sense in which he can possess and yet not produce.

“If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful” (2 Peter 1:8).

They must be possessed to benefit us; they must abound to bless others. The word “abound” is a wholesome word. It is peculiar to Scripture, especially as touching upon the bestowments of the Lord. They are always bountiful. The amplitude of His grace is ever and always a matter of challenging wonder. The word “abound” means, literally, to overflow. It is illustrated by a vessel under an hydrant with the inflowing water rising higher and higher in the vessel until it at last reaches the brim and begins to pour over the sides. This is the extent to which God desires the all things of His giving to be in us-to the point of overflowing to others. Then, there will be no subjective dearth and no passive denial of the Lord’s commands.

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). The Things of Honest Practice

“For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10 b).

Here, then, looming brightly in its elevating encouragement, is the true secret of continual spiritual triumph. It is not in the provision or in the possession, as indispensable as these are, but in the practice. It is reasonable to conclude, in the light of this wonderful revelation, that all failure and defeat in the Christian life of any individual is rightly attributable to a lack of practical application, either through neglect or through deliberate rebellion against heavenly orders.

Having shown how sadly one can fail with regard to one’s daily life in Christ, the Apostle is emboldened to plead for the positive and preferable procedure: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10 a).

Realizing that we are utterly incapable of making either our calling or our election sure, we must understand that the Holy Spirit, here, through Peter, is calling upon God’s people to exercise themselves more carefully and cautiously to confirm their calling and election. How? In making their faith to be vitalized in practice.

In order to establish a strong incentive and to encourage constant diligence in the accepted practice of the faith, the Apostle adds, “For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11).

This is the rich reward for a well-run race; this is the victory of a well-fought fight of faith.

- It is the eternal joy of having “gold, silver and precious stones” (1 Corinthians 3:12), to be divinely assayed.

- It is the joy of hearing from the lips of the Lord of Glory, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

- It speaks of a meeting and greeting of the Coming One without being “ashamed before him at his appearing” (1 John 2:28).

Peter is here urging all in the course of Christian profession to keep their eyes on the goal and to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Php 3:14). The Things of Helpful Preaching

“I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things” (2 Peter 1:12).

Here is a faithful preacher, who, knowing the tendency of people to forget even sacred matters of importance, exhibits a commendable determination to keep the challenge before them. They might not like to be prodded. They may even resent the constant reminders, but the Apostle was firm in his promise and decided in his intention.

They may have requested this emphasis to be dropped from his preaching, for he added in his epistle, “Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance” (2 Peter 1:13).

Thus, the expression “to stir you up” means to arouse by reminder.

Every decadent age, filled with indifference and fraught with the dangers of loss, requires this emphasis. This is prodigiously illustrated in the Minor Prophets. But when has there been a day when it was not necessary to stir up the hearts of God’s dear people?

An experience in the life of Paul provides for us a very vivid description of the professing Church of today. At Troas, in the company of Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius and Timothy, a meeting was held with the saints. Because of their departure the next morning, the Apostle prolonged his message until midnight.

A youth by the name of Eutychus was sitting in the window but “being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead” (Acts 20:9).

Likewise, the Church has sagged down in slumber while the enemy sows his tares. It has dropped from the third story, so suggestive of the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), the presence and power of the Lord.

Why did the Apostle decide to preach about these things unceasingly? Perhaps his hearers knew them, even understanding them well. Yes, they did know them. He stated that they did. His purpose, however, was to make sure that they were “established in the present truth” (2 Peter 1:12).

Knowing about a truth and being established in it are two vastly different matters. There are multitudes of professing Christians who are informed about the tenets of the faith, but

comparatively few are steady-minded in them. Peter himself could remember the day when his impetuosity rendered him grievously unsteady. But now it is different. He is a towering strength of encouragement to others. He would wave every believer down the course to cross the line a winner. The Things of Hopeful Perpetuation

“Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance” (2 Peter 1:15).

Peter’s desire was twofold.

First, that they might be established in the present truth to experience a scriptural godliness.

Second, that they might leave for posterity a challenge sufficiently attractive to induce their children to live a life of like character according to the divine standard.

God’s standard for life is higher than the world can conceive or appreciate, and holier than the Church is wont to believe and accept. It is one of absolute justice and purity. Perhaps it is too high for Christians to reach?

But then, a standard of godliness is not to be reached; it is to keep one reaching.

- It is the incentive which keeps one pressing on.

- It is that vision of higher and greater things which makes us dissatisfied with our strongest effort for Christ.

- It is that impelling challenge which elicits prayerful devotion to the Lord.

- It is a constraint which the trusting heart cannot avoid.

God’s standard for life is a towline which gracefully directs the barge of human energies into the channel of spiritual productiveness.

- It is the indispensable inducement which brings the desires of true disciples into sweet concurrence with the divine will.

In order to fulfil God’s purpose, one must be willing to abandon one’s own designs and desires and leave all to follow Christ. Nothing should stand in the way. Just as a soldier of the state disentangles himself from all civil and personal pursuits, even so the soldier of the cross must sever all ties that could in any wise hinder a full obedience to the commands of the Captain of the Lord’s hosts. Then, having made such a wise and profitable decision, there must be a faithful pursuance of that purpose. “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

The tiller of the soil would plow a crooked furrow if he looked back, and the servant of Christ would walk a crooked path if he diverted his attention to nonessentials or extraneous matters. He must run with constancy and consistency the race that is set before him, looking always and only unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Moses was a great leader, but death terminated his leadership. Peter was a faithful preacher, but he must follow his Lord in a similar decease. Ministers come and go, but the people must go

on-ever on!

The reason which Peter had in mind for urging a perpetuation of these things is too obvious for mention. One generation follows another, and the bearing of the former upon the latter, spiritually, is marked. Bezaleel conscientiously finished the work God gave him to do in constructing the tabernacle of old because he had a heart interest in doing the will of God. The explanation for this is simple. His paternal grandfather's name was Hur (Exodus 31:2).

Hur means "noble". He was a noble man of prayer. His father's name was Uri. Uri means "enlightened". A praying father will always enlighten his children, who, in turn, will properly instruct their children in the things of the Lord.

Timothy is another example. The unfeigned faith which Paul found in him was resident, before him, in his grandmother Lois and also in his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). Unless the spiritual standard is raised noticeably and soon, one cannot but fear for the succeeding generations. The things of divine provision must be perpetuated in our testimony and life. The Things of Harmful Preclusion

"But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:9).

We may either possess or preclude the blessings of the Lord. If we are not fully furnished unto all good works, either through neglect or carelessness, indifference or rejection, we ought to know something of the divine diagnosis of such a case.

HE WHO LACKS THESE THINGS IS BLIND

He is blind to his own status. He knows not what he is missing now or what he shall miss hereafter. He has only a form of godliness, denying the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5).

Let us understand of what this denial consists on the part of one who is satisfied to have merely a form (morphosis) of profession. It is not an open denunciation of the power of God. It is not an attempted denial of the existence or the extent of that power. It is robbing oneself of the provisions and privileges of that power-all through a lack of knowledge of God. This has ever been serious. We find at least one echo from Old Testament times: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

HE WHO LACKS THESE THINGS IS SHORT-VISIONED

- He does not see the fields white unto harvest with the labourers so few.

- He does not see that there is no man to stand in the gap which is his responsibility to fill.

- He does not see that upwards of five thousand souls die every hour of the day and night, of whom only a small percentage is ready to meet the Lord.

- He does not see that he must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to render an accounting.

He is short-visioned. He only sees what relates to himself and his own personal comforts. What a dreadful status! What a sorrowful plight!

HE WHO LACKS THESE THINGS HAS FORGOTTEN THAT HE WAS PURGED FROM HIS OLD SINS His character and conduct give no perceptible evidence of his being translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

The course which he follows shows no indication that he has submitted to a new Lord. The company he keeps offers no proof that he is now a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The interests which engage his attention and absorb his energies in no wise betray the truth that the blessed Holy Spirit lives within (1 Corinthians 6:19).

He has forgotten that one day, weary and worn and sad, he came to the cross where the Saviour willingly lifted the load and sweetly and tenderly instructed him to go his way, with the assurance that He would be his constant companion, even until the consummation of the age.

This statement of failure with its far-reaching consequences is given for our admonition. Why should we fail? According to His divine power He has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. Why should we linger in the shadows? He is the Light, waiting and willing to flood our pathway with the very effulgence of His own glory. Why should we be so impoverished? Every good gift cometh from Him with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He desires to give us freely all things (Romans 8:32).

"Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

The "now" has its implications and the "then" its contemplations. Together, they call us to the utmost sobriety and reverence.

- Now, it is the walk; then, it is the welcome.

- Now, it is the practice; then, it is the presentation.

- Now, it is the exercise; then the entrance.

- Now, it is the obedience; then, it is the abundance.

- Now, it is the remembrance; then, it is the reward.

- Now, it is our calling; then, it is His coming.

"If ye do these things, ye shall never fall."

~ end of chapter 4 ~

03.05 The Stratosphere Of Spiritual Longing

CHAPTER FIVE THE STRATOSPHERE OF SPIRITUAL LONGING “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Psalms 61:2). WHEN THE PATH OF THE SAVIOUR’S design and the course of the saint’s desire fail to coincide, there is a state of broken fellowship. Such a divergence at once presages a deviation of interests and provides the groundwork for spiritual waywardness. We have yet to learn that while the Master’s yoke is easy it is not elastic, and those who find themselves veering from the path of true devotion would do wisely to emulate the Psalmist in his heart-cry, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I” (Psalms 61:2).

To say the least, David sensed his own insufficiency and desperately sought needed assistance. Here is one who is not content to pick a path through the jungle of reason. And it is most intriguing to analyze this small part of his recorded supplication.

It has all the earmarks of intense earnestness in its content and all the evidences of eagerness in its transmission. It indicated distance, desire and decision. It bespoke the search of faith for solidity, security and support, all of which he well knew were discoverable in the Rock.

He Advances with a Confession HERE IS A REVEALING SOUL The discerning spiritual mind will find more than metaphorical value in David’s use of the term “Rock”. His cry was not the hasty, ill-considered and ordinary outburst of an overwhelmed heart-one that is sobbed forth meaninglessly.

On the contrary, it is a choice appellation possessing rare historical beauty, spiritual gravity and inspired design. It was as though his whole soul began filling with the firm assurance that the Infinite God would be his strong defence. Such confidence struggles for expression-it must be expressed-and when it issues full-clothed in clear understandable language it cannot but inspire others even as it has encouraged and strengthened the heart which gave it utterance.

May God bless in our memory the undying experiences of those noble personalities of another day who, though they were thrust by life’s varying experiences into the quicksands of dismay, saw luminously before their tearful eyes the unfailing ROCK and knew that He was ever and always within the reach of their feeble hand of faith. May we also learn how to properly recognize the One from whence cometh our help. THE ROCK OF PERFECTION

Perhaps Moses never waxed more eloquent than when he began to sing of the greatness of his God. The first stanza of his song abounds in rich poetic similes which sparkle as particles of gold scintillating in the noonday sun. “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew,” he sings in the key of jubilant reverence, “as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers upon the grass; because I will publish the name of the Lord-He is the Rock, His work is perfect” (Deuteronomy 32).

THE ROCK OF PROVISION.

“And there was no water for the congregation” (Numbers 20:2).

This posed a problem of disturbing proportions for Moses. The people rose against him. Their cries were distressing. They wished that they were back in Egypt, or that they had died with their brethren.

Pessimism was rampant. It required nothing less than the glory of the Lord to dispel the shadows and to brighten the situation. “Thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the Rock” (Numbers 20:8), was the divine instruction to the troubled leader. When Moses had done this, “the congregation drank.”

Then the Lord sent them “honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock” (Deuteronomy 32:13).

The “Rock-provisions,” therefore, for those who are upon the Rock; are water, honey and oil-the refreshment of grace for the life, the sweetness of grace in the life and the power of grace through the life. THE ROCK OF PROTECTION The Spirit of God ever employs expressive imagery. When He desired to show us the great need which mankind has for the Great Deliverer, He called the place of our sojourn “a weary land” and used a desert to further symbolize it. Then He presented Christ as the great Rock in such a circumstance (Isaiah 32:2).

- What a hiding place in the midst of a desert storm would mean to a sojourner, Christ is to one in the storm of life.

- What a covert would mean as protection from the blowing sands of the desert is what Christ means when the blasts of adversity strike with crushing velocity.

- What rivers of water would mean to the thirsty traveler over the hot sands of desert wastes, Christ means to the thirsty heart.

- Just what a shade tree would mean to the sun-fatigued desert plodder, Christ means to the trusting one in the heat of life’s little day.

And every truly born again person may say with assurance, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight” (Song of Solomon 2:3).

THE ROCK OF PROFESSION The smiting of the Rock in the wilderness might not have meant more than a religious ceremony to many of that day, but it was divinely intended to set forth much profound truth. The Apostle Paul had no doubt about the matter. “That Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4), he pointedly told the Corinthian believers.

- The Rock that followed them, had found him.

- The Rock that had favoured them, had filled him.

- The Rock that had been smitten formerly in a figure was later smitten in fact, and that Rock was his Saviour. THE ROCK OF PROMISE The complaint which Jehovah laid against Israel was that the people had lightly esteemed, and had carelessly forgotten, the Holy One Who had intervened in their behalf. Moses made clear the seriousness of this offense by stating that it was against the “Rock of salvation” (Deuteronomy 32:15).

When we were extricated from the slough of despond by simple, trusting faith in Calvary’s provisions, our feet were set upon a rock (Psalms 40:211).

That Rock was Christ. And the salvation found in and through that Rock is of present blessing and prospective bliss. It is the Rock of eternal stability which makes the future so gloriously bright that we may, by faith, exclaim with Rabbi Ben Ezra, “Grow old along with me; the best is yet to be.”

He Appeals with Evident Concern HERE IS A REACHING SOUL

There is something expulsive about David’s plea which is not unusual when one’s heart is overwhelmed.

The heart, it is said, dilates with joy, contracts with sadness, breaks with sorrow, melts with discouragement, forsakes with terror, is desolate with amazement, and fluctuates with doubt. When there is a combination of these coronary reactions, one could well be incapacitated or even prostrated. What peace and consolation it affords one to know the “Rock that is higher” - the true Source of help from above! THE OUTREACH OF FAITH The outreach of faith is prompted by need, promoted by knowledge and made positive by assurance. Faith, though forced by circumstance, will sooner or later accept the invitation to “come boldly to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:12).

David wanted to know what the righteous can do if the foundations be destroyed (Psalms 11:3).

The first thing the righteousness can do in the midst of life’s terrifying reverses is to ask themselves, “Why stand we in jeopardy?” (1 Corinthians 15:30).

Christians may not be able to prevent themselves from plunging into disturbing situations, but they can prevent themselves from remaining there. How? By appealing to the One who is mighty to deliver. This is precisely what the Psalmist was doing when he cried, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.”

The disciples, too, were in jeopardy when the dreadful storm overtook them on the lake and their little craft was beginning to fill. “Master! Master!” they appealed with pronounced alarm, “We perish!” Luke 8:23-24)

But they didn’t. Their reach for the Rescuer was richly rewarded. THE PATHWAY OF LIGHT

Amid life’s varying and inevitable vicissitudes, one may, at any time, find oneself in the dense darkness of perplexity. Yet, there is “A light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19).

This light not only shines, but it shines ON. It pierces and penetrates the darkness. It is absolutely invincible. “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not [overpowered it]” (John 1:5).

If it could be overpowered by darkness, there would be no vestige of hope for mankind. THE UPLIFT OF TRUTH AS the truth is variously manifested, so is the darkness which attempts to militate against it.

God’s Light encounters the darkness of unbelief, the darkness of disobedience, the darkness of rejection, and the darkness of rebellion.

- What is unbelief but indifference?

- What is disobedience but insincerity?

- What is rejection but infidelity?

- What is rebellion but insurrection?

Were all these forces allied in opposition to the Light, and they are, they cannot overpower it. It shines on! Indifference ignores the Light; insincerity evades the Light; infidelity refuses the Light; insurrection opposes the Light, but the Light shines on-ever on! It shines on in spite of treason, treachery, and tyranny.

- The Light will destroy the antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:818).

- The Light will reveal sin (John 12:48).

- The Light will fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

But as a timely agent of practical blessing, it is the Christian's indispensable comfort, for it illumines the way through the dismal valleys of dismay to the High Rock that is "a very present help in trouble" (Psalms 46:1).

He Admits the Present Course is Low HERE IS A REASONING SOUL The Rock to which he was appealing was concededly higher in every conceivable respect.

This must obviously be so since God is in view, but it sometimes requires the presence of an enemy, the pressure of duty or the perplexity of a situation to give one this proper perspective. There is some reason to believe that even David felt sufficiently capable of holding out in the struggle against a foe-at least, for a while, for he said, "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

In other words, "I can get on for the time, but when I am incapacitated, transport me to the Rock." This is an exaggerated view, yet it is so like men to look upon God as the last resort. But all the while David reasoned that he would need the Rock that was higher than he. Without this elevated spiritual position, one is operating on a low plane-too low for one's good or for God's glory.

LOW IN DEVOTION

Mary sat at the feet of her Lord to learn of Him (Luke 10:39).

John leaned upon the breast of the Master and felt the heartbeat of His love (John 21:20).

But the Saviour of men waits in vain for the hearts of His people to warm up to Him sufficiently to say in truth "Lord Jesus, I love Thee." Ofttimes, when there is a formal expression, the Lord is forced to say grievously,

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

How greatly do we need to be led to the Rock that is higher.

LOW IN DESIRE

How oft would the Lord gather us together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but today, as of old, we will not (Matthew 23:37).

The thought involved is that of the Father cuddling His children to His bosom. What parent does not delight in doing this? But the disposition to respond is lacking on the part of God's children.

There is a widespread obstinacy and prevailing indifference-an independence which is contributing to present-day spiritual delinquency. The desire to love, honour and serve the Lord is anything but prominent.

LOW IN DEEDS The neglect to invest the pound (Luke 19:20), the hiding of the talent in the earth (Matthew 25:25), the failure of the son to go to the field when he promised (Matthew 21:30), are but a few of the recorded parabolic incidents of the Lord's displeasure with the inactivity and unproductiveness of His servants.

He definitely wants us to be "doers of the Word and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

Are we low in deeds? Is there a carelessness about the expenditure of our energy? What have we, thus far, to lay at His pierced feet in the way of dedicated accomplishments?

LOW IN DELIGHT When we love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might, such devotion strengthens our desire to please Him. Pleasing Him is only possible as we seek to do His will; and doing His will results in the deepest, most soul-permeating joy which man can experience.

- There is joy in following Jesus;

- There is joy in seeing the results of His great power through us;

- There is joy also in seeing others enter into the riches of His grace.

The matter works conversely as well.

- If the devotion to Christ is weak, our desire to please Him will be lessened.

- If our desire to please Him is faint, our deeds for Him will be few.

- If our deeds for Him are sparse, our delight in Him will be almost nonexistent.

How unimpressive is the professing Christian who does not know the joy of the Lord! We must be led to the Rock that is higher.

He Approved the Higher Way HERE IS A READY SOUL

Active faith not only recognizes a good thing or a better way but is ready to approve and appropriate it. What kind of reticence is it that stands aloof and irresolute when the riches of all heaven are being proffered? What will a man give in exchange for his soul? What will a believer count worthy of being exchanged for his reward? THE HIGHER WAY PROVIDES BETTER VISION

He who reaches the Alpine peaks of spiritual devotion is rewarded with a clear panoramic vision of the waiting fields in the valley of human need. His view will not be obstructed by the multitudinous

mounds of self-interest which hinder the vision of one on a lower plane. Then, too, it is easier to descend to the ministry of work when once we have ascended to the mountain of worship. Lookout towers are ever on the heights-never in the valley. The reason is obvious. Nor is it less reasonable that elevation is of utmost importance in the spiritual realm.

The outlook of God's people is suffering irreparably in this day as a result of the course which is being followed.

It reminds us of an airplane disaster in southern England during World War II. The plane had hit the tree tops and plunged into a burning heap of wreckage, killing all the occupants. The investigators returned this terse report of their findings: "Flying too low."

We would do well to covet that optional spiritual status of "mounting up with wings as eagles" (Isaiah 40:20).

We are flying too low. We haven't the vision which makes for an aggressive endeavor of the finer type. The higher way, near to the heart of God, gives one the proper outlook. THE HIGHER WAY PRODUCES GREATER VITALITY

Life on the higher plane is conducive to better health and greater strength. He who lives in the shadows lacks the sunshine. The mountaineers of God's grace are the sturdy stalwarts who can meet a task and see it through to completion. They know how to climb the steep ascents to heaven. They are not easily fatigued when on assignment for the Lord- never weary in well-doing (Galatians 6:9).

They are hearty and wholesome in their attitude as healthy folk always are. They know the meaning of walking and talking with God Genesis 5:24). THE HIGHER WAY PROMPTS WIDER VENTURES DO you ever dream of doing exploits for the Lord? You begin by asking, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6)

You grow in willingness to be used as each task is performed, each assignment becoming less a duty and more a privilege. The joy increases until greater joy is desired. The capacity for patience and endurance increases, and boldness with eagerness becomes stronger. Nothing then is too difficult to do for the Lord; no loss is too great, and no danger is too terrifying.

Faith, when properly developed, will venture forth in the face of death and will count it an honor par excellence, if need be, to be numbered with the martyrs. We should long to be led to the Rock that is higher, if for no other reason than to be encouraged to attempt great things for God. THE HIGHER WAY PROMISES CONSTANT VICTORY

"Now thanks be unto God which always leadeth us in triumph" (2 Corinthians 2:14, Margin).

- To be led to Him is to be led by Him.

- To be led by Him is to be led upward and onward.

It ought to be news of the most sublime character to learn that the Captain of our salvation dearly desires that we shall know the joy and blessing of constant victory, and that He is definitely able to make it an hallowed actuality in our lives.

It is plainly evident that He is more eager to do for us than we are willing to have done. We seem indifferently content to live on low planes of broken fellowship when we might be on the highways of boundless blessing.

- We could mount up on wings as the eagle, but we creep along on the shaky legs of an impoverished faith.

- We might daily follow the paths of righteousness for His name's sake, but we listlessly wander on the bypaths of selfishness for our own gratification.

Let us be advised that only the Rock that is higher can lift us out of defeat and dismay and promote us in the way of spiritual happiness. He who submits consistently to this able direction will never swerve from the course and make shipwreck of his faith (1 Timothy 1:19).

He Acknowledges Personal Incapability HERE IS A RELIANT SOUL The one who proceeds in this direction is destined to exult with the victors, but now he says, "Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling."

There is the imposing enemy to plague; here is the impotent man for its prey. He must have a shelter, a strong tower, a tabernacle in which to abide, and a covert (Psalms 61:3-4).

Relief must be forthcoming-soon. It is then that a most encouraging vision comes before his faltering heart. There, on the horizon of his weakened faith, stands the Rock that is higher-higher than his enemy, higher than his needs, higher than himself- the Gibraltar of Divine Protection.

DAVID IS COMMENDABLE IN HIS DESIRE

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3).

Only those who have a sense of spiritual poverty will reach for the riches of God in Christ Jesus, and theirs is the kingdom.

All the succeeding beatitudinal promises which comprise that immortal mountain message stem from the value of that first utterance. "He opened His mouth" (Matthew 5:2), we are told, and what issued from those sacred lips was richer far than "apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

We call them beatitudes, the simplest definition of which is given as "supreme happiness". This is the mountain-height desire of our Lord for His people.

"These things have I spoken unto you," He explained, "that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

David was reaching out for such a blessing.

DAVID IS COMMENDABLE IN HIS DECISION

He had an intelligent awareness of the place of refuge. Of course, that in itself was not sufficient. Knowing about a place of security does not make one secure. Many people know about the Saviour but they are not saved. Decision is ever the determining factor. One towers to the apex of better judgment when one says with determination, "In the Lord put I my trust" (Psalms 11:1).

The tempter had taunted and jeered at David, urging him to “Flee as a bird to your mountain” (Psalms 11:1).

This, of course, was unmitigated folly, and he refused to yield. Now, he has decided to fly as a believer to the Rock, and this was unadulterated faith.

DAVID IS COMMENDABLE IN HIS DOCILITY

“Lead me to the Rock,” he appeals with a willing tractableness. It is this attitude that prompts and permits a man to slip his baby hand into the firm and helpful grip of Infinite Power. And is not the Good Shepherd a leader of the sheep?

Is it not encouraging to Him when His sheep show the disposition and determination to follow? He also appreciates the dependence which such a supplication denotes. Here, however, the request is to be led to the Leader.

Reliance is placed upon leadership external to himself and his plea is directed to none other than the Lord God. How good it is that we may with confidence commit our souls to Him “as unto a faithful creator” (1 Peter 4:19). And what shall we say more about the practical implications of the text?

Time and speech would fail us.

David in his heavenward appeal, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I,” accepted more able leadership and showed himself a resigning soul. He also approached with heart overwhelmed and thereby proved himself a repentant soul. After all, there is only One Who can meet our every need-only one “Friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

To know the approach to Him and to sense His tender, waiting welcome, comprise an asset of immeasurable proportions for the one who finds his own limited resources insufficient for the exactions of life. None is sufficient; all need the Rock that is higher.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

03.06 The Distinctive Divine Differentiation

CHAPTER SIX THE DISTINCTIVE DIVINE DIFFERENTIATION “The Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptian and Israel” (Exodus 11:7).

DEFINITION IS THE SIMPLEST form of exposition. It not only indicates the class to which a person, place or thing belongs, but fixes the position of the same within the class. The Bible is prolific on the subject of ethnology and has much to reveal concerning the divisions of mankind into races. All of these races are the people of God’s hand, but not all are called the sheep of His pasture (Psalms 100:3). We will find interest in observing how the Lord turns the spotlight of Scripture upon a certain people and sets them apart for Himself. The Position of the People of God

“For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6). THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE

Choice with Deity is more than arbitrary selection. It is the establishment of an object upon which God can fix His love, for love must have an object. When the object is chosen, the love of God overlooks the deficiencies with patience, overshadows the weakness with power, and overflows the requirements with profusion. The choosing of the Lord is utterly incomprehensible. He does not look for merit in man because it is not discoverable in him, insofar as commending himself to God is concerned. Every choice He deigns to make but magnifies His transcendent greatness, for “God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Thus, the Israelites did not come into divine favour because they were more numerous than the other races. “Ye were the fewest of all people” (Deuteronomy 7:7), they were forcefully reminded. Then, in unmistakable plainness and directness, the reason is revealed: “Because the Lord loved you” (Deuteronomy 7:8).

Nor can the Church find any other reason for its position, privilege and prospect in the divine economy. He commended His love toward us when we were despicably in sin and desperately without hope (Romans 5:8).

Love is the answer. Love is the pen which writes the names of all ransomed ones indelibly in the family record above (Luke 10:20).

Love is the welcome which receives us as cherished children into the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE A SPECIAL PEOPLE

“The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

The word “special” is as choice as it is rare. It means to shut up securely as jewels and precious treasures are protected, or to embrace as the breast encloses the heart. “They shall be mine, said the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels” (Malachi 3:17).

Yes, the people of God are His jewels. But more impressive still is the intimation in the above definition that the people of God are in the bosom of the Father, gathered unto His heart and contained in His affections as the heart is held within the breast of man. This is how our life is “hid with Christ IN God” (Colossians 3:3). THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE AN EXALTED PEOPLE

“Chosen . . . a special people unto Himself” (Deuteronomy 7:6).

The people are not chosen for, but rather unto the Lord. The word “unto” is used twice in this one verse. Its importance is clear.

Our faith in the provisions and propositions of the Lord does not merely set us apart for Him but brings us unto Him. This speaks of nearness, attachment and relationship, and embodies all the profound aspects of the doctrine of reconciliation. It indicates that the distance has been dissipated and the difference obviated, all because the disqualifying disease (sin) has been expiated.

It is wonderful how God can take a poor lost sinner, save him from his sin, set him free, and then elevates him to a position in “heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:3).

Compare this with Jehovah’s invitation to Moses, “present thyself there to me in the top of the mount” (Exodus 34:2), and you will more clearly understand Hebrews 11:39. “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

That “something better” gives us the exalted privilege of being “kings and priests unto God” (Revelation 1:6). The Possession of God in His People

“For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself” (Deuteronomy 14:2).

Here is divine affection of infinite capacity concentrated upon an elective nation. It is as though Jehovah in His transcendent power and excellent glory deigned to bend over the parapet of heaven and whisper to the hearts of these ancient people that they were exclusively His-His very own. It is a tender statement that throbs with pronounced desire for their undivided devotion.

THEY WERE PECULIARLY HIS BY PURPOSE

“I have created him for my glory” (Isaiah 43:7).

This is something of a rocketing revelation which transports us with abruptness into supernal realms. We cannot pursue this information to its ultimate meaning, but we can, be our vision ever so dim, see the direction in which it takes us. Nor should we lose sight of the identification here. The early-part of this chapter gives us the salutation of Jehovah: “O Jacob . . . O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee” (Isaiah 43:1).

We know, therefore, to whom He was speaking. And why were they redeemed? For His glory.

Let it not be imagined that the Omnipotent God was so impoverished that it became necessary for Him to supplement His holy requirements by calling upon a race of humankind, fewest in number of all, to be His own dear people.

The Lord Jesus spoke of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5), explaining that this glory was synonymous with the Father Himself. It is His own nature, inherent and effulgent. Fulness requires no addition.

In one of the last scenes depicted in the Sacred Volume, we observe the uselessness of the sun and moon in the city eternal in the heavens, for the glory of God will illuminate it (Revelation 21:23).

Eternity itself will prove the undiminishableness of His glory. No, His purpose in separating an earthly people unto Himself was not supplemental in Character. It was objective in design. He wanted human hearts in which to shed His love abroad (Romans 5:5).

He preferred earthen vessels as a repository for His treasure that the excellence of His power might be made manifest (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Faith stands with firm affirmation of the fact of God's purpose and exclaims with jubilant appreciation,

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

THEY WERE PECULIARLY HIS BY PLAN

Faith could not ask for a more pleasant engagement than to sit back and witness the unfolding of Infinite plans. With all the precision and inexplicable wonder with which the Unseen Hand unfurls the smiling beauty of the rose, turning back petal by petal with meticulous care, even so the indomitable purposes of God come to fruition with accuracy and timeliness (Isaiah 14:2728).

Concerning the people whom the Lord God bore on eagles' wings and brought to Himself (Exodus 19:4), we will find it both interesting and profitable to consider His calling of them, His covenant with them, and His care for them.

We are forced, however, by space limitations and present purpose to bypass the historical details relative to the romance of Israel. We will content ourselves in this treatise with a few terse but authentic confirmations of the relations of God and His people. We must tread softly as we come before the tender truth of His outflowing affection. "I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine," He reveals. "Thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee . . . fear not: for I am with thee" (Isaiah 43:1; Isaiah 43:4-5).

This is a heart-claim upon a people and a heart-covenant with them. But that is not all: He shows abounding interest in all their concerns. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee . . . when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned" (Isaiah 43:2).

"Water . . . fire!" Israel found these to be more than figures of speech, as have we all. They are real waters-swirling, dashing, turbulent waves-an actual tempest to inundate plans, to uproot happiness, and to submerge faith and hope. And the fires? They too are real. The flames are hot at times, but they can do no more than consume the dross and purify the gold when the Master of all problems is WITH us. The plunge into the waters and fires may be sudden, but the promise is that we shall pass through. Not only that, but we shall have the divine Paraclete with us as we

journey. We are peculiarly His.

THEY WERE PECULIARLY HIS BY PROVISION Of all the great convocations of other days and our own, none has been more vividly reported than the rally at Shechem in 1427, B.C. Joshua summoned a cosmopolitan company, consisting of elders, judges, officers and the heads of Israel, to rally before him just prior to his decease (Joshua 24:1).

Rising to the fullest height of his persuasive ability, he laid upon the conscience of their hearts a challenge of timely importance. He delineated in their hearing instance after instance of the goodness and the grace of the Almighty. He cited at least fifteen historical experiences where Jehovah intervened on behalf of their ancestors, supplying them with protection.

He recalled that the Lord had given them a land for which they had not laboured, cities which they had not built, and vineyards which they had not planted. All of these divine blessings proved God's interest in and His love for those whom He called to be His people.

Joshua's point of appeal emphasized the serious need for rededication of body, soul and spirit to the Lord. If Israel was a peculiar people unto the Lord, even more is the Church God's Peculium. Comprised of both believing Jew and believing Gentile, it is the body of Christ. The Purity of the People of God

"Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself; thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God" (Deuteronomy 14:21).

Since the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism contends that the above verse is in direct contradiction with the words, "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2:11), we ought to clarify our minds with regard to the text.

Professor Mason of Cambridge translates the verse: "Ye shall not eat any carcase; shouldest thou give it to the sojourner who is in thy gates he would indeed eat it; or shouldest thou sell even to the foreigner he should not object to buy; but thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God."

This is a masterful differentiation. BEING THE PEOPLE OF GOD DEMANDS PURITY

It is not what others claim or do that sets the standard for the people of God; it is what He desires of their devoted hearts. Why should the sojourner within the gates of Israel object to eating the flesh of an animal which has just fallen dead? Why should the foreigner have scruples against buying a lamb that has just succumbed, especially if the price seemed right? What the sojourner and the foreigner did, was one thing; what God's people did was quite another. They were holy unto the Lord, and His law called for abstinence from these things.

Quite frequently people, outside that sphere of blessing into which grace has so sweetly brought us, seek to tauntingly harass the people of God. "Why, there is no harm in this or that," they contend, little realizing that, as water and oil will not mix, even so godliness and ungodliness are equally non-mixable.

By "ungodliness" we do not necessarily mean that which is indecent or vile. We mean that in which God is not found, the entering into which would fail to bring Him honour. Being the people of God

makes the difference.

The Jews were not expected to criticize the foreigner and the sojourner for their behavior; they were simply reminded that they themselves were “an holy people unto the Lord.” Their position dictated their policies and procedures. They were governed by holy laws which did not appertain to the nations, the keeping of which brought them into divine favour-their faith in which was counted unto them for righteousness. We, too, as Christians, are governed by distinctive decrees which have no practical application to the world of men at large. Of course, they will do many things without the least compunction of conscience, and why not? But we are an holy (separated) people unto the Lord. That is the difference. BEING THE PEOPLE OF GOD DENOTES PURITY

God does not demand a beautiful vessel for His work, but He does desire a clean one.

Even an unscrupulous person expects a higher type of behavior from one who is a Christian, and one whose acts or statements ill become his profession is readily denounced by the unbeliever. Since we are partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and God is holy, should not our oneness with Him bespeak purity on our part? And, since the Holy Spirit dwells within believers’ bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19), should not the fruit of the Spirit be apparent? Should not Christ be seen in Christians? Are these not the most likely conclusions?

- Was not the Apostle Paul amazed when he found that Christ was not formed in the professing believers at Galatia? (Galatians 4:9).

- Was not the Lord Jesus disturbed in heart when He sent His message to Sardis, in which He said, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead”? (Revelation 5:1).

Our profession of faith in the finished work of Christ should not only give us standing with God, but before men as well. BEING THE PEOPLE OF GOD DEVELOPS PURITY

We must not be blinded to the fact that there is growth in grace. We begin our spiritual babyhood with the “sincere milk of the word” (1 Peter 2:2).

We are expected and exhorted to proceed toward maturity and the ability to take and to assimilate “strong meat” (Hebrews 5:14).

What has this to do with the matter of purity? Much in many ways. We are cleansed by the washing of water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26).

The deeper we go into the purifying Truth, the more evident effect will it have upon our lives.

The Christian has a weighty inducement to be progressively sanctified. It is twofold:

He has (a) the charge-“Be ye holy for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16).

He has (b) the challenge-“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he (the Lord) is pure” (1 John 2:2).

Besides this, the Scriptures abound in encouragement toward this end. “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,” the beloved Apostle urged, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

By “perfecting” is meant to execute or to fulfil further. Elsewhere it is rendered “perform” (Romans 15:28; 2 Corinthians 8:11).

The main emphasis is that of progress or advancement. And it seems to be high time the church was evidencing more maturity and revealing more definite conformity to Christ, for in eternity past He set His eyes upon her; came one day to seek and save her; now sanctifies and sustains her. The Privilege of the People of God

“ . . . to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 26:9).

With each reminder that they were an holy people unto the Lord, there came to Israel a further unveiling of the hallowed relation which they sustained to the Most High. Here is a choice revelation. It sparkles with beauty and abounds in impressiveness. It speaks its own message with clarity and emphasis, and presents itself to our minds under three distinct captions.

Jubilation-“Made in praise.”

The root of the word translated “praise” suggests both sound and color. What is divinely built into the believer should enable him both to shout and shine. He should not be out of tune or off color. He should not sound out dreary notes or show forth drab hues. The word also denotes laudation; literally, a hymn. “We are his workmanship (poiema- poems)” (Ephesians 2:10).

The people of God are not to be blank verse or unbalanced meter, but are to possess rhyme and rhythm.

- The Lord wants to express Himself through us.

- He desires to sing through us notes of promise, peace and hope to those who are without melody in their hearts and face the bitter wails of a lost eternity.

- He wants to shine through us to those in dense darkness of sin and despair.

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Appellation-“Made in name.”

What God makes enjoys the prestige of His great Name. He impresses His very nature in the souls of believing people and stamps His own name upon their foreheads (Revelation 22:4).

- It is an everlasting name (Isaiah 56:5).

- It is a tower of strength, providing a safe retreat into which the righteous may run (Proverbs 18:10).

- It is the badge of honour, the emblem of authority and the insignia of power.

- It is the banner under which countless millions have marched in the fields of godly conquest.

David brushed aside the armour of Saul and bulwarked himself with the name of the Lord as he attacked and retired Goliath of Philistine terror. Those who understand the meaning and experience the sacred exercise of heaven-tuned affections in united worship, know that, ere finite

creatures can enter into the veil of such solemn nearness to the Infinite, they must gather in His name (Matthew 18:20).

Nor are the resources of the Throne of Grace released in response to supplications of praying saints until there is presented the Name that all heaven honors and adores (John 14:14).

The name of the Lord given to His people is the imprimatur of the Master upon the servants whom He chooses, and the watermarks of distinction in all those who are ambassadors of Christ. It contains the necessary appeal and the inherent power to govern the words and works of the Christian (Colossians 3:17).

The promise which God gave through Moses was to the effect that He would make His people excel all others in praise and name and honour. Since He is faithful Who has promised and will perform, this has become a blessed actuality.

- No other people can boast of the “new song” which the Saviour implants within the heart.

- No other people can contemplate the triumphal rejoicing which will ensue among the redeemed in the most excellent glory.

- Nor is there a name so rich in suggestion attaching itself to any other people.

Its meaning is derived from Him Whose name is called Wonderful (Isaiah 9:6).

We, with Paul, are chosen vessels to bear that name before the peoples of the earth (Acts 9:15).

This is a privilege par excellence.

Veneration-“Made in honor.”

Jeremiah was commanded to visit the potter’s house in order to hear the Lord speak. The artificer had just discovered a vessel of clay that had developed unsightly imperfections, so he put it on the wheel and made it again as seemed good to him. “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?” saith the Lord (Jeremiah 18:6).

Then, piercing the mists of futurity, the time is envisioned when this shall be an accomplished fact and they shall be unto Him “a name of joy, a praise and an honour” (Jeremiah 33:9).

While the Lord both desires and deserves honour of His people (Malachi 1:6), it is crystal clear that the greater part of the honor which accrues heavenward is not what the people do for God but what God does for the people.

The word “honour” merits some attention. Of its many occurrences in the Old Testament, the word thus translated, seems to appear but three times.

- In the first instance, it has to do with purpose (Deuteronomy 26:19).

- In the second with praise (Psalms 71:8).

- In the third with prospect (Jeremiah 33:9).

Each mention concerns comeliness, beauty, majesty and glory for the people whom the Lord has chosen. How can we comprehend the deep significance of His love which He has set upon us?

Although we are now filled with His joy and adorned with His Name, the honor which he has designed for us is now but embryonic. One day it will issue in the full birth of excellence and grandeur. If there is any doubt in our minds about the future glory of Israel, there need be no nebulosity about the prospect of the Church. We shall see Him and shall be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Glorious day, this! The Promotion of the People of God

“The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself” (Deuteronomy 28:9).

This is the fifth and final occurrence of this differentiating description of the people of God as found in the fifth book of Moses. The word “establish” has to do with strength, sustenance and success, all of which the Lord promises to them whom he has brought unto Himself.

STRENGTH FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD When it comes to problems, plights and perplexities, the Apostle Paul had run the gauntlet. When his course had all but ended, he testified, “Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:17).

Regardless of the heavy exactions imposed upon our limited resources, reinforcements and replenishments are rushed to the trusting heart (Deuteronomy 33:25).

The Lord told Israel to dismiss all fear and dismay, that strengthening assistance would be borne to them with the right hand of His righteousness (Isaiah 41:10).

If Paul could do all things through the strength which Christ vouchsafed to him (Php 4:13), then may all Christians do likewise. It is undoubtedly unfair to claim inability for the performance of a profitable ministry when His empowerment is so available.

Our weakness is but the opportunity for Him to prove His strength.

SUSTENANCE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

God can prepare a table in the wilderness or provide a feast in the midst of a famine. If it requires the dispensing of manna from heaven or the dispatching of a meal by a raven, God is able. He has done it; He can do it again. David affirmed that he had never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread (Psalms 37:25).

Paul promised that all our daily requirements were assured in the divine economy (Php 4:19).

“All things come of thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14), David prayed with heartfelt thanksgiving.

James, too, exulted in the knowledge that beneficent gifts and perfect presents descend from Him with whom no variation occurs nor shadow cast by His turning (James 1:17).

It is not delivery to His people which concerns our heavenly Father; it is devotion from them.

SUCCESS FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Let us remember that the word “success” is suggested by the statement, “The Lord shall establish thee.”

Establishment is success. If success is the attainment of a happy and favorable status, then one has entered into a fortunate position indeed who has become established unto the Lord. And this

is prerequisite to spiritual prosperity.

A paraphrase on Psalms 91:1 may help us here: “He who becomes established in the place of the Lord’s appointment, shall continue with permanence in nearness to the Almighty.”

These are days when establishment unto the Lord is sadly neglected, with an increasing demand upon us for superficial stimulants to “keep the people going” in a weak and wavering profession.

When faithful Samuel of old perceived that Israel was bent on having a king as the heathen round about, he pleaded with the people to ponder the matter more thoroughly. He reminded them that the Lord had advanced Moses and Aaron. The implication was to the effect that, whether they had judges or kings; true promotion comes only from the Lord who knows the end from the beginning.

The question was; will you pursue a devious, unpromising course? The same question obtains today, and is no less serious. We need to be established. We must be established if we are going to enjoy success in the things of God.

“Ye are an holy people unto the Lord.”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

Chapter 55

03.07 The Repeated Request For Revival

CHAPTER SEVEN THE REPEATED REQUEST FOR REVIVAL “Wilt thou not revive us again?” (Psalms 85:6).

TWO QUESTIONS ARE RAISED by the subject at hand.

First, are we concerned about religious revival or spiritual renewing?

Second, would we, in this day of such fearful and false conceptions, understand a true definition of REAL revival?

And, if we did comprehend its meaning, would we be willing to accept it at its face value?

Perhaps designations and characterizations have sadly perplexed the issue and distorted the thinking, but what is sorely needed in our accelerated plunge downward is a solemn turning of our hearts Godward in humble submission to His holy will, thus permitting Him to manifest His presence and power in our midst. The present leanness of soul, carelessness of living and barrenness of service have had so gradual a development that the professing Church has not only not felt any cause for alarm, but has become confirmed in its indifference.

Before there can come a real awakening and a time of refreshing from out of His presence, there must of necessity be contrition of heart, even deep sorrow of soul for the prolonged indifference toward God, and the deep grief we have caused the Holy Spirit. We must be bent and broken sufficiently to feel the hurt which our coldness, stubbornness and impenitence have inflicted upon the heart of Christ. Real revival is not a process, but the outcome or result of the freedom with which we permit the Holy Spirit to operate in and through our lives.

We must endeavor to sense the deep longing of the Psalmist when he solemnly entreated the Lord, saying, “Wilt thou not revive us again?” At once, of course, we detect a concern. Spiritual conditions had dipped to a very low ebb. The godlessness of the atmosphere was becoming rather stifling, and his surging emotions found an outlet in a tearful supplication which betrayed a distressful soul, a desiring heart and a discerning mind. He knew the present spiritual status was lamentable; and, in seeking a betterment, he knew the source of blessing.

“Thou,” he said, almost breathlessly, somehow realizing that he must fall back upon God or upon nothing. Who else could help? Who else possessed the goodness, the grace, the greatness?

“Thou!” his poor, weary heart was pleading. He was addressing the wonderful One, the waiting One, the willing One-the One who had said, “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people” (Psalms 65:2).

The prayer was necessarily brief. Desperation never engages in lengthy supplications. “Lord, save me!” cried Peter as the waters began to swallow him (Matthew 14:30).

That was all, but it brought results. So it was with the Psalmist. The burden of his plea was in the one word “revive”.

- They needed revitalization for, while there was life, there was no manifestation.

- They sought restoration, for something was lost.

- They desired resolution, for purpose was gone.

The word “us” represented God’s erring people, God’s disobedient children, God’s fruitless servants; and the significance of the word “again” inheres in the fact that it recalled a better day; it referred to former blessing; it requested another opportunity. The Revival Possibility

Real revival comes when there is;

- A willing waiting upon God,

- A sincere confession of sin,

- A longing to be forgiven,

- A readiness to make restitution,

- A willingness to forgive others,

- An attempt to correct strained relationships,

- A voluntary abandonment to the Lord of all we are and have,

- A pronounced eagerness to know His Word and will,

- A determination to practice the Truth as He reveals it,

- A private, personal life which is in complete harmony with the public testimony.

With these simple, well-defined conditions met, let us observe what supports the possibility of genuine, Spirit-promoted revival.

GOD WANTS TO REVIVE HIS PEOPLE Of this we may be well assured. What father would delight in the sickliness of his child? What parent could rejoice in the waywardness and disobedience of his children? That the present need is pathetically and irrefutably great is apparent. The hour calls for a challenge of no small proportions.

When the Apostle Peter spoke of “stirring up” the minds of the people by putting them in remembrance, he employed a term which meant “to awaken fully”. Many times in every age God’s people have been stirred but not awakened sufficiently to acknowledge their sins and to rally to the cause of Christ, but our Father wants, with affectionate longing, to infuse us with the abundant life.

GOD WISHES TO RENEW HIS PRESENCE

He desires to refresh the hearts of His people and to inspire them with holiness. The flesh is capable of making a grandiose display before a decadent age, to elicit the applause of the crowds; but it does not change the heart from its wild propensities.

It is the recognized presence of God that humbles the heart, strengthens the soul and encourages service. To Moses, Jehovah assuringly promised, “My presence shall go with thee” (Exodus 33:14). The quick response of God’s servant, and a very natural one, was, in effect, “How could we possibly go on?”

God will manifest His presence among His people when conditions permit Him to do so.

The benediction had just been pronounced at the close of the evening meeting in a church in Pennsylvania-the close of an ordinary service-when someone in the congregation began singing, “I’ve wasted many precious years, now I’m coming home.” The sudden unannounced singing began before the people had attempted a departure. It gradually increased in volume and impressiveness until it seemed that an Unseen Hand was directing the congregation as a full-sized choir.

A lady in the rear pew arose and walked resolutely to the front, only to be followed by others, all of whom knelt to sob out their hearts before the sympathetic and understanding Saviour. About half of the congregation departed, while those remaining, for the most part, knelt between the pews. When the evening had ended, more than thirty precious folk, with moistened eyes and shining countenances, were assured of a work of grace in their hearts. Joy was predominant among all who were there.

When a discerning brother of Christian maturity was asked his reaction to this glorious occasion, he simply replied, “Anyone could readily see that the Holy Spirit was pleased over something, and the Lord sweetly manifested His presence.” These are the times of refreshing which He wishes us to experience.

GOD WILLS TO REVEAL HIS PURITY

“Launch out into the deep” (Luke 5:4), the master commanded Peter, when he had completed His message to the people on the shore. With long, strong, and steady strokes, the little craft was propelled through Genesaret’s historic waters. Did Peter know where the depths were? Of course, those waters were as familiar to this fisherman as his own homestead. But he was to find other depths-depths for which his heart had longed but which had never before become his blessed experience.

It was an experience which one gains, not by plying the seas, but by bending the knees.

Of all the varied developments in Peter’s fife, none was so fraught with tenderness and beauty as that which occurred in the little ship in mid-sea. A strong, sturdy weather-beaten fisherman, in bent posture, is broken at the knees of Jesus. His bearded, upturned face is stamped with indescribable, gripping amazement, “Leave me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8), the poor fisherman mumbles, his eyes suffused with tears.

This was the grandest moment in the life of the Apostle. It was the same Lord Jesus Whose call he had obeyed; it was the very same One Who had pushed out from the shore with him. There was neither conviction nor exclamation on his part then. But now, he has “launched out into the deep.”

Now, he has witnessed something, sensed something, faced something which had never become apparent to his understanding before. What he had seen, what he had perceived, quickly revealed

to him, by contrast, the sinfulness of his own heart. With Isaiah, he was saying, “I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

It is only as we SEE Him, see Him as He is in all the perfections and purity of His character that the purging is desired and the live coal from off the altar is requested.

GOD WAITS TO RELEASE HIS POWER

Simultaneously with the renewal of the presence of the Lord to a believer’s cold and cluttered heart, and the revelation of His purity, comes the release of His power. It is resurrection power. It lifts one back to a higher plane, back to heaven’s tableland; back where fellowship is once again enjoyed freely with the Father and with the Son.

- The thoughts are elevated;

- The faith is strengthened;

- The heart becomes eager to do the will of God.

Revival is not a momentary emotional upsurge. It is an unforgettable dealing with Him Whose irresistible voice, which will call forth the dead from their graves, has issued the sovereign command to rise to higher heights in our spiritual experiences. This is spiritual revival-a new display of the new life which was gained through faith in Christ as Saviour-an energy which transcends and outlasts all fleshly effort, making the conduct attractive, the ministry productive and the prayer-life effective. The Revival Plea In the days of Ezra, a throng of people came together in the street. They came, not in response to a church bell or the heralding of a trumpet, nor yet at the summons of a spiritual leader. The Scriptures state that “they gathered themselves together as one man” (Nehemiah 8:1 a). It was a symphony of desire. Their motive was indicated in the specific request they made of Ezra the scribe: “Bring the book of the law of Moses!” they cried concertedly.

Then, as if the scribe might misunderstand their request, they added, “which the Lord had commanded to Israel” (Nehemiah 8:1 b).

Anyone who has an active imagination can graphically enlarge upon this scene, which we could deeply wish might have a present-day reenactment

It is implied that Ezra was pleased with the request, for he complied at once, returning to the vast congregation with the law. How little do we appreciate the fact that the Scriptures are so available.

In a report just released, the American Bible Society has begun to spend three million dollars, the largest budget of its one hundred and thirty-one year history, for five million, four hundred and eighty thousand Bibles, Testaments, and Gospels of John for foreign countries.

But in that long ago day the copies of the Law were few. There was no criticism of a service being too lengthy; there was no indication of restlessness. They wanted the Word of God. This proved the pronounced thirst for the Water of Life which people may possess, and the prominent manner in which it will manifest itself if not suppressed.

The plea of the heart for revival grows out of the soil of self-dissatisfaction, and longing for it germinates at once when an honest appraisal of the life is made.

- None can satisfy the heart like Jesus.

- No other love is so warm and welcome, so true and tender.

- No other type of life is so exemplary or so commending as that which is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

- There is no other mental frame comparable to the assurance that we are operating within His will.

And, when one ray of Divine revelation is allowed to shine through the shadows of a backsliding condition, it at once becomes apparent that one is complete ONLY in Christ (Colossians 2:10).

All the supplemental things which had been accepted and applied are proved to be false and insufficient. Then, when the loneliness of being causes the heart to sink into that weird, indescribable emptiness of distance from Christ, even as anyone whose footing becomes insecure grasps for something solid, so the repentant one reaches out insistently for the Rock which is both our Foundation of security and our Fountain of blessing. This longing, being interpreted, is the same cry as of old, “firing the Book!”

“To the weary and sin-bound who sought for His aid, Did Jesus ever say ‘No’?

And to those who desired Him and earnestly prayed, Did Jesus ever say ‘No’?

No, no! a thousand times no!

Jesus will never say ‘No’;

To those turning from sin, inviting Him in, Jesus will never say ‘No’.” The Revival Plan

Ezra stood on the pulpit of wood (the only mention of pulpit in the Bible) and opened the book.

The people stood at once as they would to honour a sovereign. That they had been sitting or squatting in the street is not to be wondered at when once we learn something of the ancient oriental customs, but the Word of God brought them to their feet.

Several verbs stand out with prominence to give us the skeleton outline of the developments of this open-air meeting.

- They stood;

- They blessed;

- They bowed;

- They worshipped (Ezra 8:5-6).

They stood in respect for the Word; they blessed in gratitude for its message; they bowed in reverence for its authority; they worshipped in keeping with its directions.

The people of that generation had, through their exile from the land, lost their familiarity with the precious language of heaven. The inspired account of this occasion emphasizes the fact that Ezra

“caused them to understand the reading”.

Then followed tears of joy; restoration of worship, fasting and repentance, confession and promise. This was revival.

As these ancient people of God were exiled from the land, just so are many professing Christians today exiled from the Lord.

-They have been corralled in the avenues of willfulness, waywardness and worldliness.

- They have stepped out of the orbit of God’s will.

- They have lightly esteemed His holy commands.

- They have faintly viewed His perfect instructions.

- They have failed to comprehend the solemn import of the Scriptures.

The first step in revival is, obviously, that of bringing the mind of the backslider back into focus with the Word of the Lord. This sets the stage, then, for His way to be followed, His will to be done, and His work to be accomplished.

“The Word of God is quick and powerful” (Hebrews 4:12).

- If we apply it to our lives, does it not follow that we would evidence its life and manifest its power? “O Lord . . . thy thoughts are very deep” (Psalms 92:5).

- If we apply His thoughts to our lives, would not our shallowness and leanness give way to depth and enrichment? “Thy testimonies are very sure” (Psalms 93:5).

- If we apply His testimonies to our lives, would not there be more certainty in our experience? “Thy testimonies are very fruitful” (Psalms 119:41).

- If we assimilate His Word, would we not be more holy?

- If we were as honest as the Psalmist and as conscientious, we, too, would confess, “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psalms 119:136). The Revival Proof

When the Holy Spirit manifested His presence on the day of Pentecost as a rushing wind, the place was filled with His presence and the people were filled with His power, so much so, that multitudes in Jerusalem were “amazed and marvelled” (Acts 2:7).

The work of the Spirit always elicits awe and wonder, for His ministry is ever productive of God-honoring results. Some of the unmistakable proofs of a genuine awakening in Ezra’s day can be tersely enumerated.

Separation. They separated themselves from the strange people of other lands (Nehemiah 10:28).

One admirable feature of this necessary move was that they did it with both knowledge and understanding. Now they knew at long last something of the way of the Lord. They had now gained or regained an appreciation of His will.

Dedication. They pledged themselves with an oath to walk according to the Word of the Lord (Nehemiah 10:29).

This, of course, is the way of life and power, the way of obedience and blessing.

Cessation. Now they would not countenance the intermarriage of their sons and daughters with unbelievers (Nehemiah 10:30).

While they were cold and indifferent spiritually, it did not matter. Since the Word of Truth has come to them with new meaning and force, and since they have pledged themselves to follow its teaching, the outlook is entirely different. All unequal yokes were now distasteful.

Ministration. When other matters are straightened out, God's people become active in His service. Their expressed desire was "for the service of the house of our God" (Nehemiah 10:32).

When so many of the members of the body of Christ are out of joint, it is to be expected that the Church militant would limp and lag when the hour calls for an immediate and powerful offensive against a treacherous foe.

The appalling characteristic at the moment is the prevailing lack of concern.

And let us not point our finger condemningly at others, but rather judge ourselves that we be not judged.

- Are our eyes toward the Lord as the eyes of a maid turn toward the hand of her mistress?

- Do our souls pant for the living God as a deer pants for the waterbrooks?

- Do we gird up the loins of our minds in earnest expectancy to hear his voice?

- Do we sit at His feet to learn of Him?

- Are we watchful in our waiting for God's Son from heaven?

- Do we, with David, experience floods of tears because we fail to keep His Word?

- Are we pained, with Paul, as we witness the interminable march of men toward the awfulness of judicial darkness which awaits them?

These are profound and sobering questions. If truthfulness is respected, many of us would experience difficulty in furnishing a favorable reply.

Do you ask, "Will God revive His people?"

He asks, "Will My people who are called by My name, humble themselves and pray and seek My face?" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

That is to say, "Will My people be revived?"

When we are sufficiently penitent to despise our sin, to disown it, and to depart from it, then will we answer our Father in heaven with David of old, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Psalms 27:8).

- Then, will God hear from heaven;

- Then will He bless His people;

- Then will the people reverence and obey His Word.

Then will the true meaning of revival be known.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

Chapter 56

03.08 The Effective Antidote For Apathy

CHAPTER EIGHT THE EFFECTIVE ANTIDOTE FOR APATHY

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3).

IT IS SUPERBLY IMPRESSIVE to observe how eminently solicitous of our welfare is the loving heart of God. Consonant with His great desire is the gentle insistence of the Holy Spirit who, in New Testament times, lays plea after plea before the conscience of Christians to avoid the pitfalls of the ancients. “Today if ye will hear his voice,” He tenderly urges, “harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7).

Then ensues the wisest of counsel to safeguard our spiritual health, to strengthen our confidence, to stimulate our action, and to increase our fruitfulness. The Challenge of the Lord to the Sons of His Love

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3).

The keynote of this verse is found in the little word “lest”.

- It introduces an admonition.

- It is indicative of danger.

- It tells us that, unless careful attention is given to a particular consideration, the inevitable result will be decidedly sad.

- It divides the verse into two parts, the second of which we desire to observe first.

LEST YE BE WEARIED This is not physical fatigue. It is mental discouragement. It is that unhealthful state of mind which breeds doubt and dismay. Spirituality had dipped to such a low ebb in Malachi’s day that the people said, “It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord” (Malachi 3:4).

They were ready to give up. In fact, they had given up. In their distorted minds, they appraised the service of the Lord as vain and His statutes as valueless. Since this was their impression, what incentive was there to spur them on? None whatsoever.

This weariness of mind sometimes asserts itself in the form of self-pity. Elijah was a good example. He went a day’s journey and sat under a juniper tree to think over his problems. No one, he thought, was as badly off as he. “It is enough, O Lord,” he complained, “take away my life . . . because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and, I, even I only, am left” (1 Kings 19:4; 1 Kings 19:14).

Personal reverses sustained, privileges lost, problems encountered, purposes defeated-all combine to produce a pressure which incapacitates. Such a condition is the direct result of failure to daily renew one's strength. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary . . . but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:30-31).

LEST YE . . . FAINT IN YOUR MINDS The weariness is the prelude or the precursor; the fainting is the prostration. This is the dangerous probability of tolerating discouragement. When one faints, one becomes oblivious of one's environment. One is not conscious of what is going on. Such an one is impotent to contribute a directed and productive effort while in such a condition.

This is most obvious from the physical point of view but let us translate it into a spiritual setting.

Inattention to spiritual exercises leaves the spiritual life weak and vulnerable. The enemy is quick to take advantage. He begins by nibbling at one's faith until doubts arise. He then spars subtly with his unsuspecting victim until the guards are lowered and then he fells him with a knockout blow. One is useless to the Lord in such a state. He is out of the picture, as it were, and the sad thing about it is, he does not know it. He does not realize that through his failure God is losing glory, the sinner is losing an opportunity, and he, himself, is losing the reward. "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

The antidote for such pathetic apathy is embodied in the first part of the verse at hand: "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself" (Hebrews 12:3).

To run the race that is set before us, we are exhorted to keep "looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2); to surmount the obstacles in the course, we are urged to "consider Him". This is more than a general consideration. It is a qualified and specified observance. Many people have given too much effort to consider the lilies of the field because of our Saviour's statement. The object of observation in His mind was not so much the flower as its growth. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matthew 6:28).

In this given antidote for apathy, the divine prescription calls for a consideration of the contradiction which the Lord Jesus Christ endured of sinners against himself.

- He was brutally buffeted and blasphemously attacked.

- He was the victim of jeers and taunts, vitriolic and vile.

The word "contradiction" (an-tee-log-ee-ah, from an-til-eg-o) means to speak against or dispute. Peter, in a tribute to his Lord's graciousness and patience under trial, said, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not" (1 Peter 2:23).

This is what we are to consider when things are contrary and people are contradictory. The potency of its stimulating effect and the strength of its counteraction are incalculable.

We may, at any time, become the victims of a false witness or the objects of an unwarranted verbal attack. How should we react? Resign from a church office? Leave the assembly? Stop praying? Harbor ill feeling? Plan revenge? Not if we consider (weigh in mind) the example of our blessed Lord. This is the antidote. Paul said, "But watch thou in all things" (2 Timothy 4:5). The Chastening of the Lord Upon the Child of His Care

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6).

Parental discipline is the tempering of childhood and youth to withstand the trials and turmoils of maturity. The chastening of the Lord is the guardrail of protection against the disastrous chasms into which disobedience would catapult those who swerve from the faith. It is the hand of love which tenderly turns wandering feet back into the course of willing obedience.

There is a threefold purpose underlying the chastening of the Lord. It is, statedly, for profit, for promotion, and for production. It is correction for character and conduct. THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD IS FOR OUR PROFIT

“For they (our earthly fathers) verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he (God) for our profit” (Hebrews 12:10).

For our profit. How wonderful is the Lord to have our interests in mind. It is a solemn fact, and one little considered, that we shall never know how many blessings we have missed through disobedience and carelessness, but the profit we have gained we shall know when the rewards are distributed. The chastening of the Lord insures for us a greater reward. This is what our Father had in view when He so lovingly counseled, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Hebrews 12:5). It is for our profit. THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD IS FOR OUR PROMO TION IN HOLINESS

“. . . that we might be partakers of His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

Promotion in holiness is simply spiritual advancement in grace, by the Holy Spirit, resulting in an evident conformity to Christ.

This is a very likely development in a believer when the Holy Spirit’s work is not hindered. Chastening, therefore, is for the purpose of eliminating the hindrances which we would otherwise countenance.

It is in a sense the burning of the dross in a refining process; but, more practically, it is divine intervention for the removal of those subtle satanic obstacles standing in the way of spiritual progress, concerning which we have knowledge (or should have knowledge) but would not of ourselves be too disposed to deal with. This occasions the necessity for the Father to invoke discipline. “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31).

That is, self-judgment would often obviate the necessity for divine chastening. But let it be known, and appreciated, that when our Father must lay on the rod, it is that we might be partakers of His holiness. THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD IS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF RIGHTEOUS TRAITS.

“It yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

Of course, discipline at the time is never enjoyable, often painful, but later on, however, it affords those schooled in it the peaceful fruitage of an upright life. This is the end to which it points, the purpose for which it is designed, and the reason for its invocation. And never forget it, the whole of the life is affected by the chastening of the Lord.

Unbecoming traits can fully overshadow the more commendable characteristics. Wayward tendencies, impious actions and improper attitudes could well choke the growth of the finer, nobler qualities of an upright life, limiting thereby the influence and effectiveness of a Christian proportionately.

Our Father could not love us with a pure, holy love if He did not move to correct such ill-advised inclinations and such dangerous propensities. Our energies must be directed into a productiveness of peaceable fruit of righteousness. The Command of the Lord for the Sheep of His Fold The instruction which follows pertains to the hands, the feet, the heart and the eyes. “Lift up the hands . . . make straight paths . . . follow peace . . . looking diligently” (Hebrews 12:12-15).

What we have here is both practical and timely. The deteriorating effects of an apathetic condition are pernicious. Apathy reduces the spiritual stamina; it blurs the vision; it curtails, if it does not entirely eliminate, the usefulness of a Christian; it robs the life of joy.

It is a present, prevailing blight which bodes ill for succeeding generations. In keeping with its malignant character, it creeps upon one so gradually that the condition is usually undetected until the vitality is at low ebb.

The fourfold command of the Lord, as suggested by the language of the King James Version, is both preventive and remedial. The symbolical significance of the lifted hands points toward prayer. “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands” (1 Timothy 2:8).

When the hands droop, the knees shake. When the knees become unsteady, the path becomes devious. When we deviate, we are at variance with the things of God and the people of God. This destroys peace and unity. It paves the way for worthless disputation. This produces bitterness. This is why Paul was firm in his exhortation to Timothy: “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16).

The surest protection or the strongest defence we can have against spiritual anemia, with its distracting disorders, is to be constantly “looking diligently” (Hebrews 12:15).

The student will observe this advice throughout the New Testament.

- “Watch and pray,” said the Lord Jesus, “that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41).

- “Live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:12-13).

- “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

It would seem that comparatively few professing Christians are enjoying the present, practical benefits of the Blessed Hope; so few are looking with diligence and with desire. The Caution of the Lord to the People of His Hand

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh” (Hebrews 12:2588).

How vitally essential is it that God should communicate with man. How utterly hopeless would we be if He did not do so. It is irrefutably established that the Lord speaks to men (Jeremiah 10:1), that He speaks righteousness (Isaiah 45:19), and that He speaks expressly (1 Timothy 4:1).

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His son” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

There is a twofold need for this important cautioning.

First, there is the danger of DEAFNESS toward His voice;

Second, the tendency of DEPARTURE from His Word.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that those “who refused him that spake on earth” did not escape the judgment of God, nor will we escape His chastening if “we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Hebrews 12:25).

This indicates something of the seriousness with which heaven views earthly inattention to the divine revelation.

God speaks to the sinner and the saint. His approach to the unbelieving world is one of gracious longing. “Come now, and let us reason together,” said the Lord; “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as (washed) wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

While these words were directed to His ancient people in their backsliding, no one will question the expressiveness of this statement as setting forth appropriately the desire of God for a lost humanity. The truth involved in it is profound in its presentation, almost incredible in its proposition and eternal in its provisions.

The burden of our consideration, however, concerns those who have already received enlightenment, those who have reveled in the announcement of glad tidings, those who have become the recipients of eternal salvation but are, in attitude and action, as renegades in their rebellion against the divine commands.

What a contrast between the firm and faithful people of God in Hebrews, chapter eleven, and the faithless, faltering folk of the twelfth chapter. The challenge must be established; the chastening rod must fall; the commands tending toward a rectification of conditions must be presented; and a caution must be registered with emphasis. “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.” The Counsel of the Lord for the Servants of His Calling “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

Discipleship involves a trinity of indispensables- learning, loving and labouring. 2 Timothy 2:15 reveals that study and service are inseparably linked together. The student is equally a workman. The grace which brings salvation teaches us to live, labour and look (Titus 2:11-13).

The subjective side is to be produced. The Lord Jesus said, “Look unto me;” “Call unto me;” “Come unto me.” This was His exhortation to the sinner. He further said, “Learn of me;” “Follow me;” “Go for me.” This was His expectation of the servant.

Jesus had just made an intimate disclosure to His disciples concerning His death and resurrection when He detected a defective perception. So little did they grasp the picture, so limited was their understanding of the matter that He deemed it necessary to teach them a lesson in true discipleship. “If any man will come after me,” He began with directness and convincing force, “let

him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

There were no questions and no apparent objections. The conditions were clearly stated. The servant either accepts them or rejects. They cannot be amended nor are they outmoded.

Today, as then, it is this standard or none. Taking up the cross speaks of preparation and price, denial and death. Following Him denotes purpose and procedure, determination and delight.

The three ultimate ends to be accomplished are statedly, acceptable service, heart reverence, and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28).

These are to be utilized and magnified in a kingdom which cannot be shaken. An inexhaustible supply of grace is available for all that perfect obedience entails in willing service and constant devotion.

In an eastern city lives an aged woman of culture and superb Christian integrity. Upon arising one morning in her apartment, she sat on the edge of the bed and reached for her clothing which was on a chair nearby. Her fingers touched the garments, but she could not grip them firmly enough to pick them up. She tried again and again without success. Having a sense of humor, she smiled at her inability, and with increased determination, reached once more with like result. Suddenly, it dawned upon her that she had suffered a slight stroke while she slept. She was sufficiently able to summon her physician who confirmed her conclusion.

How illustrative this is of the Christian Church today. It has suffered a stroke while sleeping, and although there is much reaching toward certain objectives, the grip is no longer there. This is the deadly result of apathy, and it is pathetic in the extreme. "Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down" (Hebrews 12:12).

~ end of chapter 8 ~

03.09 Curbing The Tide Of Unbelief

CHAPTER NINE CURBING THE TIDE OF UNBELIEF

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1).

ALL THE WHILE THE ALLIES were loath to shell the Benedictine courts during World War II. The enemy within the walls was exacting the lifeblood of our beloved sons. Forbearance in some cases is utter folly. It requires a turning of the guns upon the infested areas to detect the howling of the wolves where the bleating of the sheep should be heard.

The archenemy of both God and man has a formidable array of suicidal generals. They have spearheaded into the laboratories of science, citadels of learning, seminaries of training and pulpits of churches. Their chief aim is to exile Truth.

Prominent among their stratagems are the fog of ignorance, the barbwire of skepticism, the camouflage of words and the smoke screen of wisdom. These deceptive schemes, pressed singly or promoted in varied combinations, whip otherwise still waters into turbulent, raging streams of distrust, carrying small barques, not too well anchored, into strange waters, either to capsize in a shipwreck of faith or to drift aimlessly with no particular port in sight. The Prevalence of the Fog of Ignorance

Visibility for many Christians has been reduced to a sad minimum. The lack of Scriptural knowledge has beclouded vital issues, weakened convictions and lessened productive activity. There is a definite deflection through disinclination. Haziness about the will of God and laziness in the work of God result from an indifference toward the Word of God. No one is so blind as the one who does not want to see.

The greatest peril to be faced is internal deterioration. Paul made frequent appeals for inward strength, both as regards the individual and the Church. He spoke about practicing godly self-control lest, while he urged upon others the principles of holy conduct, he himself might be disqualified. He never feared the external foe.

Someone has remarked that when his enemies threw him into prison, he came out the other end with a convert under one arm and the jail gate under the other. But, his great concern was ever about himself. He knew well that the enemy is busily engaged in the strategy of breaking down internal resistance.

Israel furnishes a graphic example.

Concerning the national situation of God’s ancient people, the diagnosis was sad indeed: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores” (Isaiah 1:5-6).

How attractive to malignancy would such a physical condition be. Even so, the spiritual situation, of which this is descriptive, bespoke a vulnerability which made the favoured people of God a ready prey to treacherous enemies which were then plotting their destruction.

Elijah had seen the portents of disaster looming ominously on the horizon. He prayed his heart out in solemn supplication and intercession: “Hear me, O God,” he pleaded, “hear me that this people may know that thou art the Lord God” (1 Kings 18:37).

“THAT THIS PEOPLE MAY KNOW . . .” Do you get it? They did not know, not that they could not have known, but because they became willing victims of the fog of inexcusable ignorance. As the tree bends, so it falls. Paul viewed with uncomfortable alarm the tendency toward unbelief in his day. With frequent and evident forcefulness, he stated, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren” (2 Corinthians 1:8).

- He did not want them to be unaware of spiritual gifts, especially of the enabling of the Holy Spirit so necessary to the acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:1).

- He did not want them to be bent under sorrow because of the decease of loved ones in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

- He did not want them to be at a loss to understand Israel’s blindness when she was the repository for the oracles of God (Romans 11:25).

Peter also showed a similar concern. He did not want the believer to be ignorant of God’s unchangeable faithfulness because the fulfillment of His promises was apparently delayed. He explained that the time element did not, in any wise, enter into the matter (2 Peter 3:8).

What is the picture now, some nineteen centuries later?

The enemy of Truth has worked relentlessly down through the stream of time. Today, there is a nebulous cast to the spiritual atmosphere. The wheat is making a life-or-death struggle for subsistence among the tares. The dynamic of the Church of Christ is but faintly evident; the offensive launched against the citadel of Satan by a valiant vanguard has all but lost its impact; and the army of Christian soldiers has literally bogged down.

Many a post is poorly manned because essentials are lacking. In a circular for the Northfield conference, Mr. Moody once referred to the fact that the Church limps and lags because “teachers are without knowledge, witnesses are without testimonies, workers are without power, and disciples follow afar off.” The Pricking of the Barbed-Wire of Skepticism

Loyalty does not seek an easy course. It does not shrink morbidly from hardship nor worry uselessly about danger. Loyalty is intent upon following, without deviation or vacillation, the path of devotion. Should that path lead through hardship of deprivation, through ordeals of persecution, or into the cold, cruel embrace of death, loyalty asks no greater honour than that of being true to Christ and His cause. Nor does it lack encouragement. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

What heart reaction do we experience toward those patient and persistent sufferers who reddened the soil with their blood and made possible the heritage which we enjoy? Loyalty does not always

take the same course, but it leads to the same end.

Whether in the first or the twentieth century, it has the same texture, shows the same dauntlessness, and is willing both to suffer and die, if called upon, in order to uphold the banner of the cross. But loyalty must face a variety of tests. Satan's desire is not so much to crush a life as it is to curb the Light. If this can be accomplished through deception more effectively than through destruction, he is quick to shift his emphasis.

Blatant unbelief is not always passive. It becomes bitterly assertive, hurling stinging, stirring taunts at those who would be true. But "thou son of man, be not afraid of them," counsels the tender, loving Lord; "neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions" (Ezekiel 2:6).

- John the Baptist was a "winebibber";

- Paul, the apostle, was "beside himself-mad";

- Jesus was a "perverter of the nation".

Such were the invectives which issued from corrupt hearts.

A skeptic is that type of unbeliever who aggressively opposes the Scriptures. He is not contented in his darkness, but constantly seeks to extinguish the light of Truth for others. His cynical attitude leads him to become vitriolic. He is not concerned about the faith and feelings of others.

Those who placed the crown of thorns on the brow of our Lord administered pain without compunction, and their kind today is no more tender in piercing and pricking His followers with daring and delight.

Caustic and cutting are their vehement outbursts as they seek to batter the bulwarks of our faith. The encouragement they receive in their ignoble efforts is surprisingly great.

This was evidenced by the taunts in the military forces when a true soldier of Christ stood firm under satanic fire. It is often demonstrated in the classroom when a godless professor seeks to embarrass a student who dares to voice his implicit faith in the Bible. There is delight in trying to confound him as argumentative students join the instructor in a common display of contempt for the counsels of the Most High.

But the worst kind of skepticism, by far, can be termed "spiritual wickedness in high places".

Before the writer at the moment is a report of a sermon recently delivered in a church of our city to a congregation including some three hundred specially invited university students. The caption reads, PASTOR SEES BIBLE AS NOT INFALLIBLE. Some of the barbed-wire entanglements which he subtly threw about his unsuspecting hearers were as follows:

"On the one side, we have Genesis with its flat earth surrounded by the sea; on the other we have a round earth, rotating about the sun, and surrounded by numerous other planets. On the one side, we are confronted with the most amazing miracles; on the other side, we learn that science can explain no end of these miracles. Six days in the week we live in an ordered world. On the seventh we open the Church door on a land of topsy-turvy, where dry sticks are changed to

serpents, cities let down out of the sky, angels stir water in wells, and bedeviled swine run violently into the sea. The men who wrote the Bible were not human robots- machines who took down what the great dictator had to say. Their conception was somewhat primitive. Passages in the Old Testament indicate God to be little better than a cruel Oriental despot."

One of the most subtle and most destructive stratagems militating against all that we count sacred is the increasing practice of inculcating doubts regarding divine authority, of questioning the integrity of the Holy Scriptures. We are rich in privilege, happy in pursuit and hopeful in prospect. All this, and more, is our fortunate estate while many other peoples are currently disintegrating, downtrodden by foes, disturbed by internal strife and destitute of the bare necessities of life.

A people that forgets God goes backward, and questioning the authenticity and the absolute infallibility of the Bible constitutes a most serious threat to our national economy and a grievous offence to the personal faith of our people.

Yes, skeptical antipathy has cut a swath through the human race, felling in windrows weak and unprotected victims, there to leave them unassisted in the restlessness of their empty lives and comfortless in their outlook of hopelessness. The Perplexity of the Camouflage of Words

Several Roman Catholic lads, while playing on the street one day, were conjuring up mischief when they noticed a minister, with clerical garb, passing by, "S-s-s-h! Here comes Father," one of the lads warned. Another of the group, recognizing the man, retorted with disdain, "He's not a father; he's got children."

The minister, overhearing the comment, laughingly asked himself, "When is a father a father, and when is a father not a father?"

Oftentimes, in these days of delusion, we are wont to enquire, "When are words words, and when are words not words?" That is to say, when are words the vehicles of the true thoughts and intents of the heart? When are they only ambiguity in orthodox apparel or false doctrine in scriptural garb?

Many ministers in our day, who are known to be unorthodox in their doctrines, maintain their prestige among weak, but truly born again people, because of their employment of scriptural terms, which, if they were asked to define, would prove their views to be utter distortions of divine truth.

The late Dr. I. M. Haldeman * cited an illustration of a well-known religious leader who was commended for his reference to the vicarious work of Christ on the cross. Later, this same leader placed the vicarious suffering of Christ in the same category with the hardships of David Livingstone, Father Damiens and Florence Nightingale.

* The King's Penknife

Perhaps nowhere may one find words so much on dress parade as in a message at a funeral service. How meaningless are so many statements as broken and bleeding hearts receive them, hoping thereby to be comforted in their bereavement. "His labours are now over and he is at rest," the minister will comment, even though the deceased was known to have utterly rejected Christ as Saviour. The Lord says, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isaiah 57:20).

“Your loved one is at peace,” perhaps the minister will say. This could only be true of one who has received the Prince of Peace by faith. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isaiah 57:21).

“He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26), are also words that have been solemnly intoned countless times by those who disbelieve and discountenance the second coming of Christ. The general resurrection theory is widely promulgated because it is read from rituals without investigation or examination. By the term “new birth” is often meant nothing more than a new vision or revival of some kind of devotion.

But what about the many careless, unthoughtful testimonies which are given in prayer meetings or young people’s gatherings? What about the solemn and significant words of hymns which fall from people’s lips whose hearts do not support the statements uttered? Words misplaced or deceptively used are decidedly harmful in their confusing effect. One must admit it, if ever so hesitantly, that we are living in a day when the true meaning of Divine Revelation is hid behind the clever camouflage of words. The Perniciousness of the Smoke-Screen of Wisdom

Liberalism actually advertises the fact that its approach to the Scriptures is academic.

The inference is clear. A man who requested a transfer from one church to another which was more orthodox in its message received an accompanying letter from the pastor which stated in part, “Join that church if that is what you want, but remember, God doesn’t put a premium on ignorance. When he wanted competent leadership, he chose a wise, educated man like Paul. Our approach to the Bible is one of education, training and wisdom.” The writer has this letter in his file.

But what is wisdom?

- Is it that degree of human development which makes it possible for man to belittle God? No, that is a superficial inflation of the ego.

- Is it that extent of human progress through investigation and acquirement that gives man a foundation for his contention that the Bible is antiquated and insufficient? No, that is deception of the first water.

Wisdom is a weighty word. It falls into a lofty bracket. It has many meanings in Scripture; i.e., prudence, discretion, quickness of invention, dexterity of execution, craft, cunning, true piety, fear of God, personification of Christ, natural instinct and sagacity. Divine wisdom and human wisdom are distinguished one from the other. Divine wisdom is from above (James 3:17). To make the contrast more pronounced, Paul declared that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom; and, with all thy getting, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

Thus, the attainment of wisdom requires the acquisition of understanding in order to utilize and enjoy it. Wisdom without understanding is like a fortune without a knowledge of it. “Get understanding.” This is supreme encouragement in sublime endeavors.

The main reason why there is not a greater display of heavenly wisdom is due to the subtle instruction of man.

Fear toward God is based upon the faulty opinion of men (Isaiah 29:11). Nowhere else in the spiritual curriculum does substitution become more subversive. It fosters insincerity, produces incapability, and leaves prevailing instability amid the ranks of professing Christians. “Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me” (Isaiah 30:1).

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalms 111:10).

This statement deserves more than casual reading or careless recitation. We would do well to inquire into the meaning and derivation of the “fear of the Lord”. It is commonly stated to be reverential trust with a hatred for evil, but this is not a thorough definition. It merely puts the phrase into its proper category. The fear of the Lord is said to be clean, enduring, inspiring, life-giving, satisfying, informative, enriching. If wisdom, true wisdom, is the embodiment of such ennobling principles, then surely it is “the principal thing.” And nothing so swells the tide of unbelief as the multiplication of those who are wise, not in Christ, but in their own conceits (Romans 12:16).

Divine Counsel for Curbing the Tide

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1).

But what have we heard? What has God been saying insofar as the immediate context is concerned? God has spoken OF His Son; He has spoken TO His Son; and He has spoken IN His Son. THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS SPOKEN OF HIS SON

Verses two and three of Hebrews one present some faith-begetting characteristics of our Lord.

- He is the heir of all things and the creator of all things.

- He is the reflection of God’s glory and the true expression of His being.

- He sustains the universe by His almighty Word; and, having effected our cleansing from sin, is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

- Here is the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10).

- Here is the One in us Who is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:4).

If we were to give more earnest heed to these unique qualifications of Christ, we would be inspired with a holier zeal, and motivated by a stronger determination to stand firm amid the changing ways of man. THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS SPOKEN TO HIS SON

We should tread very softly as we come to the portals of truth as found in Hebrews one, verses five through thirteen. The Father is speaking to His beloved Son. We listen with quickened heartbeat and with subdued minds as the direct address develops:

“Thou art my Son . . . I have begotten thee . . . Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever . . . God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands . . .

They shall perish, but thou remainest . . . Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." No regenerated person can listen to these words without a stirring of the emotions. It is all about the incomparableness of Christ. None with Him can compare, and He is my Saviour. Will I desert Him for the passing fancies of this age? Not if I give more earnest heed to these things which I have heard. There may be strong academic persuasiveness and attractive cultural acquirements in the sphere of infidelity, but, with Peter, my heart cries out when the decision must be made:

"To whom (else) shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS SPOKEN IN HIS SON

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

This is the voice of authority, the voice of challenge, the voice of eternity. What could be more sobering to a careless Christian?

What could be more startling to a drifting disciple?

- It is the voice that will speak forth the reward of the saints.

- It is the voice that will sound the doom of the sinners.

Surely that voice is not being heard by the rank and file of church people today. If it were, there would be a more even cadence in the walk, a quickening of the pace and a decided definiteness about the direction of the going. His is the voice of victory.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

03.10 The Further Appeal To Fellow-Workers

CHAPTER TEN THE FURTHER APPEAL TO FELLOW-WORKERS

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” 2 Corinthians 6:1).

HERE IS A CALL FOR MORE cautious and careful treatment of divine bestowments. In the development of his appeal, Paul envisaged a threefold danger; namely, the disuse, misuse and abuse of God’s grace. The Danger in the Disuse of the Grace of God

“We . . . beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” Disuse of the grace which God so wonderfully and so liberally supplies is, wittingly or unwittingly, a thwarting of the purpose of God. This must be viewed subjectively and objectively. THE GRACE OF GOD BROUGHT US A PERSONAL SALVATION

“For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8).

The holy involvements in so sacred and important a matter cannot be fully comprehended this side of the veil. When we think of the present joys and future blessings which are and will be ours irrevocably, faith at once points its finger to the grace of God as the sole and unchallenged reason.

- Grace sought us when we were far from God and effected our reconciliation.

- Grace saw us when we were in the slough of despond, hopelessly dejected, and interposed its strong arm to lift us to the Rock-foundation.

- Grace observed our impoverishment as non-participants in the covenants and introduced us to a joint-heirship with the Son of God.

- Grace perceived the turmoil of painful restlessness in our hearts and led us into the peace chambers of the Most High, made rich by the blood of the Saviour’s cross, where the tranquility of His peace settled with comforting bliss upon our turbulent souls.

- Grace took cognizance of the fact that all we like sheep had wandered away, and with tender affection welcomed our believing hearts into the household of faith.

- Grace viewed with concern our prodigality as we sought to subsist on the husks of the world, and brought us to the Father’s banqueting house.

- Grace knew the brutal lashes which our old master inflicted, and wooed us into the tender care of Him whose banner over us is love.

- Grace witnessed the scorching rays of the sun which beat relentlessly upon our poor, weary lives and directed us under His shadow. THE GRACE OF GOD TEACHES US HOW TO LIVE The grace of God teaches us that “we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12).

This is the norm of spiritual comportment. It is not only higher than the highest moral plane, it is a different plane. It is a realm in which grace gives enlightenment, strength and direction, for the Christian's disciplined conduct is not the successful overpowering of fleshly propensities by imposing stringent measures of personal prohibitions. It is definitely more than telling the "flesh" to behave itself, or run the risk of suffering a lenten moratorium on desired excesses. Asceticism is merely an attempt to "discipline the old man", a curbing of the natural self. Spiritual behavior, or Christian conduct, is the Spirit-motivated life taking precedence over the flesh. It is the dominance of the Spirit in a yielded person.

There is no greater incentive to godly living than sweet, daily communion with the Lord, made possible by grace, for friendship tells on character. Sooner or later we become like those with whom we keep company.

If our friend has high ideals amid the sinful ways of man we, too, shall have caught some real sweetness from the rich aroma of that life. We cannot thwart the molding influence of a constant friend.

This is especially true in the spiritual sphere. Those who are on more than speaking terms with the Lord experience this truth. Only this very day, we heard a thoroughly dedicated young missionary say, "I pray as I walk along the street and the Lord is as near and as real as if He were walking by my side." Such a person has little difficulty with his conduct. THE GRACE OF GOD SUSTAINS US IN TRIAL

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

While this inspiring revelation came pursuant to Paul's indescribable excursion to realms supernal, and while there was no human medium for his transmission of the account of this experience, one does not need to ascend to the third heaven to understand about God's sufficient grace. Nor is His divine strength made perfect in Paul's weakness only.

"For there is no respect of persons with God" (Romans 2:11).

Every truly born again person is integrated into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) and is in vital contact with the source of supply which furnishes each member of that body.

- If it is a temptation which plagues you, "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:138).

- If it is a perplexity which drives you to your wits' end, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

He who does not find such sweet and complete relief from the storms of life has received the grace of God in vain (without using it). THE GRACE OF GOD STRENGTHENS US FOR SERVICE

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

As stewards of the manifold grace of God, cherishing intense love and practicing hospitality, all for the glory and honour of God, we are not surprised if we are tested by fiery trial (1 Peter 4:12).

If we are reproached in the line of duty for the sake of the name of Christ, His grace will enable us to count it a joy that we are partakers of His sufferings (1 Peter 4:13-14).

In a street meeting conducted by the students of the London Bible Institute, a young lady handed a gospel tract to a man passing by. The man received the silent messenger which could have brought him the joy of meeting and knowing the Saviour. At once, and with a disdainful attitude, he tore the tract to bits in the presence of the one who graciously handed it to him. A Christian business man from the city of Detroit was standing nearby. Witnessing the incident, he walked over to the Bible Institute student and said: “The Lord Jesus saw that transaction and has given you credit for your dedicated attempt to reach that man. He will also bless you for the rebuff you have sustained.” If His grace were not received in vain, we would be more industrious in His service. THE GRACE OF GOD MAKES US WHAT HE WANTS US TO BE

“But by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The Apostle made this statement approximately twenty-four years subsequent to his conversion to Christ, and just a few years prior to his martyrdom. *

* Ussher’s Chronology.

It was made, we may conclude, while he was keeping the faith, fighting a good fight and running well the race (2 Timothy 4:7).

The power resident in him, making him competent and effective in his exemplary ministry, was the grace of God. It was the impelling force which gave to him his vitality, his vision, his ventures and his victories.

What the grace of God did for him and through him, it is capable of doing for and through us-that is, if ye have not received it in vain. THE GRACE OF GOD IS DESIGNED TO REACH, OTHERS WITH THE MESSAGE OF REDEEMING LOVE

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2 b).

It can be clearly seen that the subjective aspect of this matter must be promoted if the objective side is to be pursued. Until His grace means everything to us, it will not mean enough to exuberantly tell others of its greatness. This period of special welcome is termed “the day of salvation.” It began when our blessed Lord initiated His earthly ministry. Standing in the midst of the synagogue with the scroll of Isaiah opened to chapter 61, He declared, “The Spirit hath anointed me . . . to preach the acceptable (dek-tos) year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19).

The Spirit, through Paul, heralds the same news, but adds a prefix to the word “acceptable” (eupros-dek-tos). This, plus the limited time suggested by “day” in contrast to “year”, gives an urgency to the message, both for its deliverance on the part of the servants and for its reception on the part of sinners.

There is not a more solemn consideration than that this special welcome time, this Salvation-day, is drawing to a close. “I say unto you, many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able when once

the master of the house is risen up, and has shut the door" (Luke 13:24-25).

With countless numbers yet to be reached with the message, and with a lessening period of time in which to reach them, we are receiving the grace of God in vain if we are not beseeching men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). The Danger in the Misuse of the Grace of God MISUSE OF THE GRACE OF GOD HINDERS THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

"Giving no offence in any thing" (1 Corinthians 6:3 a).

This was a statement of true experience on the part of Paul. It is a statement of serious warning for us. The implications are solemn in the extreme.

- There is the suggestion that obstacles might be hurled in the way of a sinner.

- There is the intimation that Christians could be the agents in such a reprehensible matter.

- There is the bald fact of inevitable consequences-for the believer at the Judgment Seat of Christ and the unbeliever before the Great White Throne.

- There is the hint that a servant of Christ may carelessly overlook or wilfully ignore the denunciation of the Master when He stated, "Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh" (Matthew 18:7).

Jesus had just revealed something of His heart's concern about human agency hindering His work in the lives of men. "Whoso shall offend (cause to stumble) one of these little ones which believe in me," He warned, "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

The local minister who recently dubbed the infinite God "the cruel Oriental despot of the Old Testament," might have some equally blasphemous word to say about the Saviour for the foregoing statement. But let it be known that the One who once pulled a sinking apostle out of a watery grave never submerged even a disobedient disciple beneath the mirrored blue of Galilee. He was simply revealing how seriously Deity detests the matter of causing others to stumble.

MISUSE OF THE GRACE OF GOD DISCREDITS THE MINISTRY "Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed" (2 Corinthians 6:3).

Upholding the dignity of the ministry is a towering ideal. The ministry of the gospel of Christ was never intended to be a means of personal promotion in popularity and prestige. To make it such is to misuse the privileges thereof.

Innumerable sermons have been delivered from dedicated lips on the sanctity of the Lord's Day with no notice whatsoever coming before the public, even in the localities of their delivery; but, when a preacher in Altoona, Pennsylvania, makes a statement from the pulpit that Sunday movies are acceptable, the matter becomes an international news item. The servant may not always know when he is out of order, but Satan does. And he is alert to capitalize on it.

- Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire (Leviticus 10:1);

- Uzziah, the king, intruded into the priest's office (2 Chronicles 26:16);

- Ananias and Sapphira withheld a promised offering (Acts 5:2);

- Peter was rebuked for apparent misconduct (Galatians 2:11);

- The Galatian believers were guilty of frustrating or laying aside the grace of God (Galatians 2:21).

These illustrations of the misuse of the divine privilege find their corresponding analogy in our day with its prevailing and increasing disregard for sacred things. The wrath of God is incurred, as perhaps never before, because the truth is held in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

Every move the believer makes either honors or dishonors the One who has called us unto His glory.

MISUSE OF THE GRACE OF GOD DISPROVES TRUE SERVANTHOOD

“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God” (2 Corinthians 6:4).

Whatsoever the Christian does is to be for the glory of God. Prayerfulness of planning, carefulness of procedure, and loftiness of purpose should characterize his every action.

It becomes a solemn consideration when we call to mind that the Christian is an ambassador of the Lord. What he does and says reflects upon the cause he represents. The servant of Christ is not to conform to this age with its whims and fancies (Romans 12:2).

- He is to be holy because his Lord is holy (1 Peter 1:16).

- He is to keep his eyes on the Author and Finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Backed by a state of separation and sobriety and impelled by challenge and hopefulness, a true servant moves out on the field of conquest with confidence. If there is a misuse of the means and privileges of grace he cannot but produce doubts as to his earnestness and interest in the vocation which he claims to be his. The Danger in the Abuse of the Grace of God

“O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels” (2 Corinthians 6:11-12).

The underlying cause for this poignant announcement is readily discoverable in the immediate context.

The Corinthian believers were losing, or were in danger of losing, their distinctive Christian position by gradually slipping into compromise and complicity with questionable entities and enterprises.

Frequent challenges for a reconsideration of their inordinate tendencies were resulting in a display of resentment.

- The preacher was a killjoy;

- The Church was too rigid in its prohibitions;

- They could not sit in a corner and twiddle their thumbs;

- They were being “hedged in”, so they thought.

And their impressions about the matter were becoming vocal. With frank firmness, the Apostle made it clear that they were not being hedged in by him, but were, to the contrary, cramping themselves in their own selfish affections. No quarters are so small.

Then came the further appeal of their fellow-workers not to accept the grace of God without using it.

2 Corinthians 6:14 to the end of the chapter is a strong, persuasive and urgent treatise on the unquestionable necessity for a separation from all associations and entanglements which could in any wise limit their usefulness for God.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

“And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”

This would bring them, and us, out into the broad, limitless field of fellowship and fruitfulness. He who thinks mostly about himself and his own desires thinks little about the lost and their need. He has become cramped in the little corner of his own affections. If the boundless stores of grace were appropriated and applied they would make us that we should no longer be barren and unfruitful.

At the moment of this writing, there is an acute shortage of electricity in the Niagara area of Canada, with legally enforced dim-outs and the use of certain appliances rigidly restricted. There is, of course, measureless power pouring over Niagara Falls constantly-infinitely more than the need, but it is not being appropriated. Instead it rushes into the rapids of non-use and reaches the whirlpool of lost energy.

How strikingly illustrative is this of unavailed, superabundant grace.

“Receive not the grace of God in vain.”

~ end of chapter 10 ~

03.11 The Siamese Twins Of Spiritual Prowess

CHAPTER ELEVEN THE SIAMESE TWINS OF SPIRITUAL PROWESS “Two things have I required of thee” (Proverbs 39:7).

EVERY GROWING CHRISTIAN encounters difficulty in transmuting into actual practical experience what he so readily accepts mentally as being the truth of God for his life. Sooner or later, he must stand with Paul in Romans 7:18 and cry, out of the distress of his heart, “To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not!”

A notable example of this is graphically depicted in the first four stanzas of the 119th Psalm, where the chief emphasis is life on a higher plane. The possibility is pictured; the procedure is prescribed; the prospect is promising; the personal pleas are presented; then the prevailing problem is posed.

The Psalmist sees the examples, hears the exhortation and longs for the experience; but when he attempts to move, he cannot. “My soul cleaveth unto the dust” (Psalms 119:25), he laments. He had the theory and the desire, even the determination, but not the ability. Nor has anybody else.

The most abject failures are those who try to live the victorious life.

But let it be said that when one gets as far as the Psalmist-the point of acknowledged helplessness -one is in a very favorable position indeed. Such a situation places one where progress begins.

When determination joins desire at the end of self, faith needs to find the necessary and sufficient assistance. “Quicken thou me according to thy word,” is the prayer which begins the victory march. The enlivening power of the Word is equally an elevating force, even as it is an enlightening agent. It lifts. But this is only the beginning.

The Psalmist knew that, if he relied upon himself at any time, he would long for the old things on the lower course as the delivered Israelites longed for the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic on Pharaoh’s table. Thus, he appealed, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me IN the way” (Psalms 119:37).

Nor was this enough. He prayed longingly, “Quicken me in thy righteousness” (Psalms 119:40).

What is the righteousness of God but the nature of God? And what is the victorious life but the nature of God being manifest in the believer in a daily triumph over the flesh?

Much is said about the victorious life, but little seems to be experienced. We have been urged on in quest of this coveted status. We have meetings for dedication, consecration, reconsecration, surrendered life and volunteering for “fulltime” service. It is not our purpose to disparage earnest attempts, nor yet to speak lightly of the methods employed, but is there not a simple formula whereby we can translate the whole matter into understandable language-some way to make practical what to many has been made so perplexing?

Satan, the subtle and sinister enemy of God and man, is a pastmaster in the art of confusing the mind. Before the unbeliever, he draws a terrifying picture of the complexity of salvation. Then the poor, helpless and doomed sinner, believing the lie, is frustrated by the disturbing metaphorical giants which the Devil marches out on the horizon of his mind, then turns away in his darkness. All the demons of hell are committed to the proposition that no lost sinner shall see the simplicity of salvation. When the conquering Saviour delivers one from this diabolical delusion, then Satan shifts his attack to make the abundant life appear as utterly impossible. And, sadly enough, believers have succumbed to his deceptive scheme.

After years of prayerful consideration of the “deeper life,” it is our candid impression that generally Christians lack honesty and courage. We are simply not honest with God. We say we believe His Word, but do we?

If we believe what He tells us, we would do what He instructs; and, in doing what He instructs, we would realize the blessed status He has described.

- If I say I am working in an office when, in reality, I am labouring in the shop, I am dishonest.

- If I say I am living for the Lord when, in reality, I am catering to self, I am equally dishonest.

When I say, “All things are possible through Christ Who strengtheneth me,” and then claim that I am unable to live a consistent Christian life, I am dishonest. To say the least, it is glaring inconsistency.

Then, there is the lack of courage.

And what is courage but trust in action, faith carrying out its assignments regardless of the cost.

- Courage in Christian endeavor is that quality which withstands caustic criticism and base ridicule, then proceeds undeterred in spite of the threats which Satan hurls.

- Courage is the backbone of loyalty.

Honesty dictates the course and courage pursues it. Few of us would be cited for gallantry in Christian conquests. When we lack courage, our convictions lack challenge, and the cause of Christ suffers irreparably. There can be no bonafide victorious life unless we are consistently honest with God and constantly courageous for Him.

Honesty With God

Paul presented plain facts about honesty; but then, all facts about honesty are necessarily plain. It is dishonesty which seeks concealment.

- Honesty can stand the closest scrutiny, while dishonesty breaks down under the test.

- Dishonesty struggles for defense, but honesty is stalwart in its strength.

- Dishonesty lives in fear of discovery, but honesty is open-faced and unsuspecting.

Honesty is more than a virtue;

- It is the strong sinew of integrity.

- It is the steel crossbeam upon which responsibility firmly rests.

- It is the dynamic which produces prestige, promotes reputation and portrays principle.

- It is the solid, reinforced footing upon which the concrete foundation of dependability is built.

- It is the bond of confidence in every worthwhile relationship.

- It dissipates doubt in dealings.

- It adds assurance to promises.

- It procures the richest of privileges.

When honesty weakens, character disintegrates.

Honesty is the escort of trustworthiness.

- It cannot forsake at play and be found dependable at work.

- It cannot default at home and be faithful in public.

- It cannot fail in private life and truly function in spiritual endeavors.

- It knows no dual standard.

If it is allowed to assert itself in the real business of life, it will be found the same tomorrow as it is today.

- It will dictate one’s decisions;

- It will rebuke unsound suggestions;

- It will recoil from unfair practices.

- It is a towering indispensable in both moral and spiritual realms. Honesty is a basic essential in all forms of uprightness.

It is evident from observation that people take unusual liberties in their dealings with the Infinite. This is nothing short of a denial of His sovereignty. And this is precisely the way in which the Lord looks upon it. He longs for the luscious clusters of the first-ripe summer fruit but receives only the grape-gleanings of the vintage (Micah 7:1).

He desires and deserves the first place in the program of our lives but receives little prominence in our daily schedules (Hosea 5:4).

He requests an unreserved heart devotion accompanied by the richest offering of which we are capable, but the treatment we accord the omnipotent, thrice-holy God would be counted an insult by an earthly dignitary. (Malachi 1:8).

We are not honest with God.

In the whole purview of Scripture (King James Version) the word “honesty” occurs but once, the word “honest” seven times, and the adverb “honestly” three times, making eleven times in all.

These few occurrences however, by no means minimize the importance of the truth involved. It underlies all the moral and spiritual precepts in the Word of God.

In these several occurrences are four points of pertinent interest:

HONESTY NOT ONLY ORIGINATES IN THE HEART, BUT APPROPRIATES FROM THE HEART THE TENETS OF TRUTH

“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15).

Thus, it requires honesty to give proper attention, permanent retention and patient intention to the prescribed precepts of Scripture.

HONESTY DISPLAYS ITSELF IN A FAVOURABLE AND COMMENDABLE REPUTATION

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3).

While the presence and power of the Holy Spirit combine to produce both wisdom and integrity in the experience of an individual, the person for this particular assignment had to have, of necessity, a reputation for honesty.

If one’s influence for Christ is to reach out perceptibly in any field of endeavor, this same characteristic is a definite “must” in that life.

HONESTY SHOULD CLOTHE OUR THOUGHTS, FOR THOUGHTS MOTIVATE OUR ACTIONS

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest . . . think on these things” (Php 4:8).

Thoughts prime the initiative, plan the procedure, presage the action and ponder the development.

If honesty characterizes our meditation, it will control our ministry.

HONESTY SHOULD CHARACTERIZE OUR CONVERSATION AND OUR CONDUCT

“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).

The point is, honorable conduct, motivated by honesty, will have an inevitable reward even though one is presently being defamed as a criminal.

The kind of honesty which can stand the test is that which elicits the approbation of the Lord as well as the approval of man. “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21).

Paul prayed sincerely that honesty might be the controlling factor in the life of every believer. “Now I pray to God that . . . ye should do that which is honest” (2 Corinthians 13:7).

In all his careful and complete instructions for the highest type of Christian behavior, the Apostle thought it wise to include an admonitory note regarding deceptive acquisitions. “Provide things

honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17).

If we desire plain facts on the subject, here they are.

The safest and surest way to protect and to promote an exemplary Christian life is to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance [every form] of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

This hearty, wholesome advice involves three practical propositions to which we shall briefly direct our attention.

IT CALLS FOR EXAMINATION.

"Prove all things."

The word "prove" in the following references means, literally, to test. By implication, it means to approve. "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." (Luke 14:19).

This test is by actual use. "That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1). This test is by obedience.

- "To prove the sincerity of your love" (2 Corinthians 8:8). This is the test of liberality.

- "Prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). This is the test of devotion.

- "Let every man prove his own work." This is the test of fulfilling the law of Christ.

Then, for a summation of Scriptural tests, Paul urges that we "prove all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This is the test of thoroughness.

IT CALLS FOR DETERMINATION

"Hold fast that which is good." The good is only discernible by examination. When it becomes apparent to our spiritual judgment, it commends itself to our determination. We are to grip it tenaciously, never to let it slip, to invest it for the glory of God, the encouragement of others, and for our own edification. It implies that what God calls good has both rigidity and stability, and faith may anchor to it with pleasant confidence.

IT CALLS FOR ELIMINATION

"Abstain from every form of evil" This is the negative side, attention to which magnifies the positive.

A man who had never visited a large city went on a trip to New York. After walking up Fifth Avenue, gazing into the store windows as he journeyed, he confessed, "I never knew before that I could get along without so many things."

Likewise, the one who becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus is amazed how well he can get along without the many sinful and questionable things which are displayed in the windows of so many unchristian lives.

In countless ways, the Holy Spirit teaches us how we may make our practical lives more honoring to the Lord. "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee; bind them about thy neck; write them upon the

table of thine heart” (Proverbs 3:3).

What a wholesome yoke! It is the easy yoke of the Lord (Matthew 11:30).

It is designed to keep us in step with Him. Also, truth and mercy are to be inscribed upon our hearts. This is to govern our affection. If we love Him, we will love mercy. If we love Him, we will obey His truth. Both the yoke and the inscription speak of definiteness and honesty in the profession of a believer. Thus, “the integrity of the upright shall guide them” (Proverbs 11:3).

How shall it guide them, and where? It shall guide them through a conscience that has not been seared by habitual malpractice. It shall guide them through a heart that is responsive to the Holy Spirit. It shall guide them through the light of revealed truth. It shall guide them into the will of God and into the favour of men.

“The lip of truth shall be established for ever” (Proverbs 12:19).

Words of honesty, truth and justice give unquestionable evidence of righteousness and have a wise and health-giving effect upon the hearers. The lip of truth in life is an immortal monument for it utters facts, and facts cannot be budged.

The use of words of honesty and truth qualify men to be counsellors with a recompense of peace and joy (Proverbs 12:20).

Courage For God

Perhaps we have forgotten that the good soldier of Jesus Christ is called upon to disentangle himself from the things of the world and to face without flinching the hardships to be encountered. There must be a reckless disregard for our own convenience and comfort. We must not count our lives dear unto ourselves. But courage for God is more than daring, more than a display of boldness. It may embody these, but it goes beyond the risk of personal interests and concerns itself with getting a job done for the Lord.

It is deeper than patriotism-and more significant. It does not say, “I will lay down my life.” No, this is secondary. It says, rather, with a ring of genuineness and resolution in the voice, “I will use my life-not part of it, but all for Him Who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

It is said that John Wesley travelled 250,000 miles on horseback, averaging 20 miles a day for forty years. He preached 40,000 sermons, produced hundreds of books; knew ten languages. At 83, he was concerned that he could not write more than 15 hours a day without hurting his eyes, and at 83 was ashamed he could not preach more than twice a day, and noted in his journal that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 in the morning. *

* From Herald of His Coming

We may not have as much to give as John Wesley or other of the stalwarts who have preceded us in the way, but were we so deep in devotion and thorough in dedication as they, we, too, would give our all-honestly and courageously.

“Must we be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize

And sailed through bloody seas?”

Let us be well advised as children of the Light. It requires the strongest of courage to withstand the wiles of the devil, but let us not misunderstand the true meaning of such courage.

- It is more than fleshly determination;

- It is more than induced avowal;

- It is more than promised abstinence;

- It is more than devised resolution;

- It is more than outward pretense.

It is that strength of practical oneness with the Lord which refuses to be daunted or deterred;

- A devotion which does not deviate,

- A virility which does not vacillate,

- A determination which does not deteriorate,

- A faithfulness which does not fluctuate.

Courage, to be bonafide, must be bolstered. It must have a basis sufficiently firm to withstand the stunning blows which the evil one will be sure to register. This is why Joshua differentiated between strength and courage. This is why he advised strength before he suggested courage. “Be strong and of a good courage . . . be strong and very courageous” (Joshua 1:6-7), he counseled.

- This called for convictions which pierce the sands of shallow profession and anchor to the bedrock of truth and righteousness.

- This called for a foundation which is firm and durable.

- It called for a careful and prayerful alignment with the purpose of the Almighty.

To be strong in the Lord demands that one plant one’s feet where the power of God is provided. Then he who stands for truth stands ruggedly. He does not quail before the threats of a Goliath or quake before the preponderant number of his cohorts. He simply takes refuge in the God of Elijah and counts not his life dear unto himself in his unflinching defence of the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Sacred history is replete with impressive illustrations of courage in action. It had to be so, else we would neither have an inspiring heritage nor a preserved testimony. Our ancient foe has ever supplied tests for faith and courage in his unceasing animosity toward God and His Christ. His warfare is against our Lord, and his strategy is to strike hard against His body (the Church). He who is touched by our injuries cries out, “Why persecutest thou Me?” (Acts 9:4)

This was the question which stopped Paul of Tarsus cold in his tracks. At the time of his planned persecution of the saints, he did not realize that he was a tool in the hand of Satan to inflict injury

upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a renewal of courage, a reaffirmation of our faith, and a redoubling of our zeal, the blessed Holy Spirit marches before our vision those stalwarts of Hebrews eleven, who being dead, yet speak. Each one might have pursued a devious path. Each one might have drifted with the current of pleasure, popularity or prestige, hut faith asserted itself in a fearlessness of death, then favored them with a devotion which knew no desertion. They were followed by the martyrs who faced the fires without faltering, had a sweet tranquility of soul before the tumultuous throngs, and died unhesitatingly amid the fagots and the flames.

We need, as never before, to be aroused from our lethargy to rediscover what it was that put such strong sinews in the spiritual framework of the stalwart Christians of former days. We need to develop readiness of mind and a willingness of heart to accept such a discovery as applicable to us, and workable in us. We must admit our surprise that we have not seen these simple but profound truths ere this, or, having seen them, humbly confess our utter unwillingness heretofore to apply them.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

03.12 The Danger Of Disqualification

CHAPTER TWELVE THE DANGER OF DISQUALIFICATION

". . . lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway [disqualified]" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

TRAGEDY IS BUT A WORD until one is enveloped in its grip and tastes of its bitterness. Then adjectives fall short of description. It looms with all the terrifying aspects of an inconceivable monster which vents its brutality without mercy upon helpless, unsuspecting ones.

Of the various kinds of tragedy, however, none can produce more unassuaged remorse than that which might have been avoided.

The Holy Spirit has marched out on the horizon of divine revelation some startling and sobering examples of defeated and dejected personalities, who, by divine judgment and chastening, have suffered a revocation of privilege, a removal of opportunity and a grievous disillusionment of indescribable intensity. An Incomparable Disappointment in the Experiences of Men

"Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building: But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood" (1 Chronicles 28:2-3).

David's career had sparkled with color and versatility. It abounded in the excitement of adventure and intrigue, of daring and triumph. It suffered, too, in keeping with the history of all mankind, some scars of defeat and intermittent shadows of sorrow, but this present announcement was as astounding as it was surprising.

That David entertained a strong heart desire to build the temple was by no means a secret to his associates. Had they not, with alacrity and meticulous care, moved at the king's bidding to "make ready for the building?"

The felling of Goliath was not to be reckoned in comparison with the honor of erecting the house of God. It was never so much as dreamed, either by David or by his most intimate associates, that he would be disqualified. Thus, he worked with eagerness toward this coveted end.

It must have been with saddened mien and unsteady bearing that the king of Israel stood before that specially summoned gathering. He called for a careful audience of his words, reminded them of the strongest desire of his life, alluded to the preparations which had been made, then announced his own disqualification. It was not sheer humility which prompted him to state the reason for this sad turn of events; it was quite necessary that he should do so. David was a popular king and the people were with him. They must know the facts. "It is," he said, perhaps stumblingly, "because I have been a man of war and have shed blood."

This sad and solemn reminder needed no explanation. Perhaps most of his hearers were participants in the dances and the hilarious volleys of applause, some forty years previously, when, with concerted voices, they screamed: “Saul slew his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1 Samuel 29:5).

Now, it was a different matter. Heads were drooped and mouths were silent. There was no celebration. The king, in that moment, was not the imposing personality who had ridden the crest of popularity during a renowned regency. No, almost like the Arabs who folded their tents and silently stole away, a great and noble leader was making his exit from the limelight of human admiration and divine privilege. And a disappointing end it was-even bitter to a heart so full of happy desire. It is hard to watch a champion go down, but this is just a further reminder that men ought not provoke the Lord nor grieve His Holy Spirit of promise. The Severe Cost of a Careless Course

“And Samuel said unto Saul, Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel” (1 Samuel 15:26).

SAUL’S TESTIMONY WAS UNTRUE The things which befell Saul were grievous to Samuel. When the Lord revealed to him the true condition of the king and the inevitable outcome, Samuel “cried unto the Lord all night” (1 Samuel 15:11).

What kind of an ignoble person would one be who finds delight in the failure and loss of another. But Saul was vindictive, even arrogantly self-justifying. “I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (1 Samuel 15:13), he assured the servant of God.

Even while he spoke; the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle put a lie to his statement (1 Samuel 15:14).

They were to have been destroyed, but there they were by the contravening and contradictory action of the king. How utterly ill-advised it is to move contrary to the revealed will of God.

SAUL’S LIFE WAS FILLED WITH PRIDE

There was a day when the King of Israel felt more prominently his dependence upon the wisdom and strength and leadership of the Lord. Now, it was different. His attitude had changed. He developed a sense of independence and was operating in his own strength. This never leads to happy ends.

How eminently essential it is for all believers to know that there are countless forces constantly at work to dislodge them from a safe position of humble dependence upon the only One who is able to promote them successfully in the various pursuits of godly enterprise.

“When thou wast little in thine own sight,” Samuel recalled, “wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?” (1 Samuel 15:17).

The tense in this statement magnifies the indictment and indicates a disqualifying turn of personal estimation.

SAUL’S HEART WAS GROSSLY DISOBEDIENT

Saul was afflicted with a prevailing spiritual malady. The blindness of unbelief supported him in his contention that he could move contrary to the divine will; then, through some superficial sacrifice, reinstate himself in the full favour of God.

It is a fleshly complex, but men struggle to bring God to meet their own terms.

- They ignore His commands;

- They deliberately transgress His revealed will;

- They bring reproach upon His cause.

Then, through some meaningless, self-imposed or humanly-suggested disciplinary acts, they themselves pronounce the matter closed.

Saul was content to believe that God would overlook his disobedience if he were to sacrifice some of the animals which he had been commanded to destroy. Samuel, with a perturbed heart, quickly disillusioned the king. “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

SAUL’S CONFESSION WAS ENTIRELY TOO LATE The one who towered head and shoulders above most others in Israel is, before God’s spiritual representative, a picture of sad and forlorn dejection.

“I have sinned . . . I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord . . . I feared the people . . . I listened to their entreaties” (1 Samuel 15:24), he mumbled.

Then he suggested that, if Samuel would accompany him, he would worship the Lord. One is weak indeed when one must have some human assistance to exhibit heart devotion in true worship. Saul presented all the aspects of a spiritually defeated man. His confession was too late.

SAUL’S PENALTY WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE Being King of Israel was an honour of no mean proportions. The people, envious of the nations round about, restlessly clamored for a king. “Make us a king, to judge us like all the nations!” (1 Samuel 8:5), they shouted before the aging Samuel.

This was their demand. Saul had the extreme privilege of being their first monarch, anointed and blessed of the Lord. Now comes the ignominious ordeal of facing impeachment. Nor could it be appealed or deferred. The announcement was both solemn and sad. It read briefly, “The Lord hast rejected thee from being king over Israel.” There it was, authoritative and final. It was a spectacular regime but it terminated in dishonour. The Sorrowful Forfeiture of Divine Fellowship

“And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel” (2 Kings 17:20).

This was only after prolonged provocation, but it was decisive when it came. Frequent notices inhere in the Penteteuchal record of definite, divine warnings to the people. The offences varied but the penalty was materially the same.

Whether parental failure or Patriarchal carelessness, whether in the congregation or in the priesthood, the Lord viewed with seriousness every infraction of His Holy laws.

One was “cut off from his people” who did not observe the law of circumcision (Genesis 17:14), or for violating the law of the sabbath (Exodus 31:14), or for eating blood in observance of the peace-offering (Leviticus 7:27).

One was “cut off from the congregation” who was found eating leavened bread. Those who desecrated the hallowed and holy things of the Lord were “cut off” from the presence of the Lord (Leviticus 22:3).

Not one of the penalties, severe as they were, cut one off from the Lord Himself. “Hath God cast away his people? God forbid!” (Romans 11:1)

For all this, God did not repudiate His people. He did, however, revoke certain coveted privileges and He also removed from them some cherished but abused opportunities.

ISRAEL, WAS GUILTY OF COURTING SECRET SINS

“And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God” (2 Kings 17:9).

They seemingly forgot that He who sees in secret rewards openly. They ought to have known that the One who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. They overlooked the fact that His eyes run to and fro upon the earth beholding. “Thou compasseth my path,” David declared, “and art acquainted with all my ways” (Psalms 139:3).Yet, in the face of such important knowledge, the flesh will attempt to take advantage of the Lord in a clandestine manner. But Israel’s sinning was discovered and rebuked.

ISRAEL WAS GIVEN TO HEATHEN IDOLATRY

“And they set them up images” (2 Kings 17:10).

This seems incredible, but unbelief will follow spurious courses. Any one in any day who becomes dissatisfied with the divinely stated way, will invariably make substitutions which will better appeal to a disobedient heart.

- They procured images;

- They placed them on high hills;

- They proceeded to burn incense;

- They patterned their course after the heathen;

- They provoked the Lord unto anger.

That is the terse report of the Holy Spirit. It was a downward course; it was a degrading procedure; it was grievous to the Lord.

- A people with enlightenment and divine direction,

- A people in covenant relationship with the Most High,

- A people duly warned against heathen practices,

- A people prohibited by sacred commandment from having idols,

- A People now in open defiance of all that is high and holy, giving themselves in reckless abandon to the false and profane.

The context portrays in drab colors how a people, once separated and distinct, now give themselves unashamedly to build images, to burn incense mockingly, and to blaspheme the Infinite.

ISRAEL REFUSED DIVINE INSTRUCTIONS

“They would not hear, but hardened their necks . . . did not believe in the Lord their God” (2 Kings 17:14).

Here, plainly to be seen, is the unmitigated folly to which rebellion against God will carry people.

- They became indifferent, insubordinate and incorrigible, for they refused to hear the Lord’s instructions;

- They declined submission to His will;

- They pushed on ruthlessly in the devious paths of unbelief.

As they entrenched themselves more and more in the ruts of waywardness and accelerated their speed into the darkening shadows of disobedience, the Lord looked down from His highest heaven and lamented, “My people are bent to backsliding from me” (Hosea 11:7).

ISRAEL REJECTED THE STATUTES OF GOD

Esau may barter away his birthright for a mess of pottage, a man may exchange his home and his happiness for the sparkling spirits at the counter of intoxicating destruction, a king may abdicate the throne of a vast empire for the love of woman, but what dreadful, incomparable miscarriage of judgment is characterized in an outright rejection of the precious Word of Life. This was the most unpardonable of all the ghastly indignities which Israel heaped upon the Most High (2 Kings 17:15).

It is difficult, at first thought, to determine whether this insidious move was the ultimate of their mounting insults against the Infinite God, or whether it was the diabolic progenitor of their ungodly misdeeds. In their pitiful and unsavory attitude they were, nevertheless, turning from the Water of Life, the Bread of Heaven, the True Light for a dark place, the only One who could successfully chart their journey of life to a blissful consummation. Unbelief takes some disastrous plunges.

ISRAEL ENCOURAGED SPIRITUAL DELINQUENCY

“They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 17:17).

A father may assert his willingness to give his right arm for the welfare of his children, but his love and devotion suffer from blatant misunderstanding if he does not use his parental influence to guide them to the threshold of Divine Truth. Failure here may emanate from a passive indifference to the transcendent value of such guidance, but parental integrity collapses utterly when home

authority is exercised in matters of questionable, if not degrading avenues of desire for their progeny. Woe to the parent whose encouragement blinds a child toward the blessings of God. Yet this was the sad indictment against Israel.

At long last, after the display of patience most sublime, the Lord God REJECTED all the seed of Israel. The inference is apparent. Let us beware of our attitudes and actions. Even divine toleration ceases, and with its cessation comes irreparable loss to men. The Disillusionment of a Presumed Assurance

“Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head; for the Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them” (Jeremiah 2:37).

This is the march of melancholy man-an interminable parade of despondent people who have tramped with uneven cadence down the avenues of time.

Their lamentations-the groanings of disillusioned hearts-are mingled murmurings of mistreatment, ill-fate and self-pity. They are those whom even God cannot trust. They are those who have taken refuge in a false security and have settled down to a contented complacency which destroys vision, ignores responsibility and rejects challenge. There is a trite colloquialism which aptly describes the state which leads to such an empty end. It is this: “As snug as a bug in rug.”

Translate this thought into the solemn and sacred realm of spiritual behavior, and it becomes a matter of serious moment.

There are those, and the company is large, who are confident that “all is well”, simply because their own estate is gratifying to themselves. They settle down to bask in the sunshine of their own good fortunes and become entirely indifferent to the needs of others. “We are safe and sound;” is what they say in effect, “what happens to others is their sad misfortune.”

The Lord evidenced His strong displeasure in this regard and caused their “confidences” to disappear as Jonah’s withering gourd. Their disillusionment, with its attendant sorrow and emptiness, was graphically dramatized as the people went out from the presence of the Lord with their hands upon their heads. They may appear disgruntled and wax critical of everybody and everything, yet no one is to blame for a state of spiritual destitution but the one who experiences it. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it” (Mark 5:23). The Price of Exploiting Divine Patience

“Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath” (Jeremiah 17:29).

These stirring, indicting statements were never made without reason; nor were they made hastily. The patience of the Lord is one of the greatest miracles of our age-of any age. The imprecatory pleas of Old Testament days, and the demand of the disciples for fire to fall from heaven in the New, readily prove how man’s patience is exhausted and how quickly he would invoke judgment.

God’s people in Jeremiah’s day were impenitent, unconcerned, bigoted, faithless and hard. “We are wise;” they insisted, “the pen of the scribes is in vain” (Jeremiah 8:8)

Three conditions led up to the drastic move which the Lord was forced to make.

First, “They hearkened not, nor inclined their ear” (Jeremiah 7:24 a).

Second, “They obeyed not the voice of the Lord” (Jeremiah 7:28).

Third, “They received not correction” (Jeremiah 7:28)

Their unspiritual alternate course led them into confusion, for “they walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jeremiah 7:24 b).

The Book of Jeremiah is characterized by:

(1) the attitude of the people,

(2) the anguish of the prophet,

(3) the answer of Providence.

When the answer came, it was firm and decisive. They were rejected. The Incalculable Loss of a Destroyed Prosperity

“As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. I will also reject thee” (Hosea 4:7; Hosea 4:6).

The willful ignorance of Israel was nothing short of an historical catastrophe. The Word states that they were destroyed for lack of knowledge.

- Those who close out the Light, enshroud themselves in darkness.

- Those who turn from His eternal will, turn themselves to inevitable woe.

- They sought but did not submit;

- They got but did not give;

- They received but did not reverence;

- They were bold in their demand but cold in their devotion.

The more they were blessed, the less they believed. That such willfulness will not long be tolerated, and that such waywardness will not satisfy, became the grim realization of these ancient people.

- Their glory was turned into shame.

- Their privileges were revoked;

- Their opportunities were removed;

- Their prosperity was lost.

- They were rejected.

Samson of old with his Herculean strength is an apt illustration. He pursued such a devious course that his spiritual power diminished to drab insignificance. The analogy is strikingly evident.

His carrying away the gates of Gaza was an unproductive demonstration- comparable to some of the fleshly efforts which the professing church today flashes through advertising channels, only to exaggerate its lessening influence. Samson's losses began to multiply. Then the end came ignominiously and with rapidity. At the knees of Delilah, in a drowsy stupor, his locks were shorn and the glory of his strength eclipsed. A troop of marauding Philistines, poised for such an advantageous moment, rushed with proud delight to the occasion, and in a matter of minutes gouged out the eyes of the dwarfed giant. Samson's vision was gone. Then, with despatch and alacrity, the fetters were affixed, and the divinely-chosen nobleman began grinding in the prison of his foes.

It was on the feast day of a heathen god that the erstwhile judge of Israel was marched in his blindness and bonds into the midst of ancient, ritualistic mockery. The command delivered to the prison guards revealed the intention of these enemies of God: "Call Samson," they said, "that he may make us sport" (Judges 16:25).

Three thousand hissing and hilarious people gazed with amused and depraved minds upon the spectacle. There was no mysterious handwriting on the wall, but the hour of bitter calamity was near. Samson found his way to the two central pillars. His arms, in what proved to be an embrace of death, encircled the pillars and wrested them from their places.

The temple of Dagan collapsed, and the scene of gaiety was transformed into a ghastly sight of horror and death for all amid the wreck and ruin in the arena of ungodliness. Samson's loss of His Nazarite separation, his strength, his vision and the presence of the Spirit of God was followed by the loss of his life. Thus, another servant of God came to a sad end through disobedience and departure.

Surely it is high time to awaken from the slumber which has slowly settled, as the gentle falling snow, upon a declining Christian testimony, now to harden into icy unconcern and stolid indifference.

Let us hear the voice of our Lord, saying, "Repent and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove THY lampstand out of his place" (Revelation 2:5).

~ end of chapter 12 ~

03.13 Purpose Glorified

CHAPTER THIRTEEN PURPOSE GLORIFIED “Therefore came I forth” (Mark 1:38).

“RISING UP A GREAT WHILE before day, he went out and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

This is an eloquent introduction to an ennobling example. Of course, faith must see in Christ more than an example, but one’s experience will suffer irreparably if one does not hear Him say, “Go thou and do likewise.”

Such word portraits as the one before us are designed for display in the art gallery of our souls, there to produce a cherished and challenging stimulant for life on a higher plane. They are glimpses of grandeur which exhilarate our spirits and exhort our hearts.

- They open the eyes of our understanding.

- They leave us with no excuse for our fearful failures in life.

- They allure our vision to heavenly heights and introduce us to the rapturous joy of being in the center of God’s will.

There and there only do His blessings flow into our otherwise parched souls in uncontainable volume, even as the sparkling, bubbling streams with invigorating refreshment descend to the needful fields below.

The immediate context, supporting the foregoing Scripture, furnishes us with several impressive points of practical appeal. They are the prominence of a place, the preciousness of prayer, and the pointedness of purpose. These are all the more impressive when we find the Saviour associated with each. The Prominence of a Place

“He departed into a solitary place” (Mark 1:35).

The place localizes the incident. Experiences are invariably associated with places.

In the earthly ministry of our Lord we have reference to the desert place, the holy place, yonder place, the place called Gethsemane, the place called Golgotha and the place called Calvary. In the glory there is a place of preparation.

IT WAS A SOLITARY PLACE

Think of it, a sovereign in solitude! Or, more accurately, we should say THE Sovereign in solitude, for how unlike all other sovereigns is the Son of God.

- As a rule, a sovereign lives in luxury and comparative leisure, but the Master laboured in love.

- As a rule, a sovereign has servants to serve him, but the Saviour served others to save them.

- As a rule, a sovereign has attendants to prepare the bed, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head.

- As a rule, a sovereign has a valet to care for his garments, but the coming King saw villains rob Him of His robe.

- As a rule, a sovereign has companions and counsellors, but Jesus was all alone-in solitude.

But he was none the less the Sovereign. Because He was alone, we need never be lonely.

HE WAS SOLITARY IN A WORLD OF SIN BECAUSE OF HIS PERFECTIONS The Urim and the Thummim (lights and perfections) were wrought into the breastplate which was put “upon Aaron’s heart” (Exodus 18:30). But these were mere symbols of what is in actuality the very substance of our Great High Priest, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the embodiment of perfection in demeanor, declaration and deed. Of none other can this be said. The perfection accredited to Noah and Asa was derived and not inherent. It was vouchsafed to them by the Lord God even as believers are perfect in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

The world had to wait until God tabernacled among men to witness the personification of perfectness (1 Corinthians 13:10).

The Lord Jesus is perfect in His will, perfect in His Word, perfect in his way, and perfect in His work. He is unique in His person, universal in His provisions, and unrivalled in His perfections. He is the perfect One!

HE WAS SOLITARY IN A WORLD OF REBELLION BECAUSE OF HIS OBEDIENCE

God was forced to say of his creatures whom He had created for His glory, “There is no judgment in their goings; they have made them crooked paths” (Isaiah 59:8).

But from the moment the Son of God stepped in human flesh upon the footstool of His own making until the time the heavens received Him in glory, His course was one of absolute flawless conformity to the holy will of God the Father.

- He submitted to the wilderness testing but wavered not an iota.

- He listened to the offer of the kingdoms of the world as made by the arch-usurper but cast not a desiring glance.

- He trekked the trail of His earthly ministry amid seductive satanic snares but stumbled never.

- He sweat drops of blood as He pursued the via dolorosa but faltered not at all.

- He was bent beneath the weight of the cross but bowed not once to diabolical dissuasion.

- When He was reviled, He reviled not again.

- When He was flayed fiercely, He forgave freely.

At the climax of ignominy, in spite of stubborn demoniacal resistance, the victory note of hope was transmitted from His blessed lips-“It is finished!” It came from the crucible of crucifixion. Then, the finger of Inspiration penned His immortal epitaph: “He humbled himself, and became obedient

unto death, even the death of the cross" (Php 2:8).

HE WAS SOLITARY IN A WORLD OF IMPOTENCE BECAUSE OF HIS POWER

All through His earthly ministry, our blessed Lord manifested His power.

- He unlocked the ears of the deaf and unloosed the tongues of the mute.

- He healed the infirm and helped the afflicted.

- He stilled the waves and calmed the troubled breasts.

- He blessed the living and raised the dead.

- He dispelled demons and transformed men.

- He amazed the multitudes immeasurably.

IT WAS ALSO A SACRED PLACE

Whatever the Lord Jesus touched is said to be sacred. The word itself is not a Bible word and sentiment sometimes forces it beyond the point of soundness. We are not disposed to believe that He transmitted virtue to the wood of the cross or to the linen of His grave clothes, nor yet to the sands on which He trod or to the sod on which He sat. But the place to which He repaired so early in the long ago was hallowed by his presence. The environs of the location otherwise may have been dull and dreary, but they were then engraced by the presence of the Bright and Morning Star, the Lord of glory. If Jesus could transform places, how much more can He transform persons. The Preciousness of Prayer

Prayer is precious because He Who is our Preciousness elevated it to an imperishable eminence in that solitary but sacred spot long centuries ago. It must be observed that prayer had a place of prominence in our Lord's earthly ministry.

IT WAS AN EARLY PRAYER The text states that He arose early and went out for the express purpose of praying. Few people underwrite their evaluation of prayer with such pronounced action. Few will corroborate their claim to its importance by such inconvenience and effort.

"Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?"

"A moment in the morning, ere the cares of day begin,

Ere the heart's wide door is open for the world to enter in, Ah! there alone with Jesus, in the quiet of the morn,

In heavenly sweet communion, let your duty day be born.

'Mid a quietude of blessing with a prelude of repose, Let your heart be soothed and softened as the dew revives the rose. A moment in the morning-a moment, if no more

Is better than an hour when the busy day is o'er." An elderly Christian gentleman, who did not find the light of a new life until he was almost seventy years of age, fell so completely in love with the Lord that it was apparent to all who knew him. He related to us this daily habit which he so much enjoyed: "When I open my eyes each morning, I say aloud, 'Lord Jesus, it's good to know Thee. I

want to walk and talk with Thee throughout this day.' Then, when I pillow my head at night, I say, 'Lord Jesus, we've had a good time together today.'"

What we need most of all, dear reader, in these critical days of increasing unrest, is a better acquaintanceship with our lovely Lord in a simple, satisfying manner. Too much do we find ourselves in the throes of technical determinism, with our faith and practice reduced to certain fixed formulae so foreign to the Word of Life. We need to enter early into the Unseen Presence and then carry with us through the day the consciousness of our Saviour's nearness.

IT WAS AN EARNEST PRAYER The prayer was earnest in reverence and devotion, earnest in meaning and outlook, earnest in content and expression. You may think of Daniel voicing his supplication in a den of danger, of Hezekiah in a plea for a protraction of years, of Zinzendorf and his pious grandmother bowed before a troop of marauding soldiers, of Mueller unlocking the storehouse of grace for orphans through constant communion, but that solitary spot, early one morning in the distant past, was the place of incomparable earnestness.

In a student pastorate of years gone by, I recall with present pleasure an elderly man who always assumed a kneeling posture and turned his face heavenward as he began to place his petitions at the Throne of Grace. Something within seemed to convince me that his was the most earnest praying of which I had knowledge.

Later, while visiting in a home in Pennsylvania one morning about nine o'clock, I heard from above a noise as of someone pounding on a table. The kindly Christian hostess, noticing my somewhat inquisitive countenance, said, "That's Dad upstairs. He is eighty years old. He has had his breakfast and is now spending an hour with his Lord before going to the park with gospel tracts."

That is real earnestness I told myself.

Then, there came to my mind with piercing vividness the old family homestead in the mountains of Maryland and the family altar. There, mother mentioned each member of the family by name. Sometimes, as she talked over matters of delicate import with the Lord concerning some of us, her voice would become affected; there were times of hesitancy, but her prayers were always pointed and precious.

"When mother prayed her soul was blessed;

When mother prayed she found sweet rest.

Her heart and mind on Him were stayed,

And God was there when mother prayed."

This, I thought, must be the most earnest praying of my knowledge.

One day, while perusing the Sacred Page, I came to the 17th chapter of John. Somehow, in such a real way, I could see, through faith, the Great High Priest as He lifted his eyes toward heaven. Then, in His incomparable manner, He said so reverently, "Father the hour is come . . . I have glorified thee . . . I have finished the work . . . I have manifested thy name . . ." Finally, He began to pray for us-you and me, all of His purchased people-"I pray for them . . . keep them from the evil . . . that they may behold my glory."

This is earnestness in its most sublime character. The Pointedness of Purpose With the Lord Jesus purpose was primary in progress. This is why there was a place. This is the reason for the prayer. With Him purpose pointed not so much to plans and programs, but to the fulfillment of His Father's will. What a noble example for the child of God to emulate. The purpose of Christ proved that He had the right perspective. HIS PURPOSE WAS POSITIVE

Denounced, denied and finally delivered to the Roman court, Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate to hear him nervously and incoherently propound many interrogations. Then, ere the court turned Him over to the crowd for crucifixion, the Lord Jesus went on record to show that the custom of the people would lead to the fulfillment of the determinate counsel of the Godhead. "To THIS end was I born," He solemnly emphasized, "and for THIS cause came I into the world" (John 18:37).

Jesus did not deal in generalizations. He was specific. There was no suppositional if in His statements. There was no uncertainty. He knew the why and the manner of His coming to earth. He knew also the type and the time of His departure. Had not He informed His disciples that "the Son of Man MUST suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed?" (Mark 8:31)

And, as to the time, did fie not in His solemn, high priestly prayer, say, "Father, the hour is come?" (John 17:1).

Yes, THIS was the end; THIS was the cause.

We thrill to the revelation of His definiteness, and well we may, but could it have been otherwise? He was the divine Son of God. He was the embodiment of perfection. He doeth all things well.

We must get beyond the thought that we are dealing with a narrative, the plot of which has been conceived in some finite mind and the characters carefully chosen to play well their parts. Many see no more reality than this. But it is real! It is REAL in a glorious sense!

The earth's Creator became our Saviour. He came so to be; nor did He for an infinitesimal part of one second lose sight of His purpose. He repeatedly explained why He had come. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost," He had said, but the world which He loved and for which He bled and died has been dull of hearing and slow of response.

HIS PURPOSE WAS PRESSING

"I must work the works of Him that sent me!" (John 9:4).

The workmen who laboured to rescue little Kathy Fiscus from the deep, dry well in California, pressed their efforts with strenuous persistence through thirty-five continuous hours with little rest and food, while as many as fifteen thousand stood by. When asked if or by whom they would be paid, and why they would drive themselves to the point of exhaustion, the reply was quickly given: "There's a little girl down there."

"That He should leave His home on high,

And come for sinful men to die-

You count it strange? Well, so did I

Before I knew my Saviour."

There were men-a world of men-down in the shafts of sin.

Legions of angels stood by. Looking over the battlements of heaven the Father saw the spirits of men whose faith had been counted unto them for righteousness. There was Abraham, the father of the faithful, Moses, the liberator of Israel, Joshua, the General of the battle of Jericho, Gideon, who triumphed over the Midianites, Elijah, the performer of miracles-but God so loved that He gave His ONLY BEGOTTEN SON that sinners wedged in the wells of wickedness might not perish but have everlasting deliverance.

The Lord of glory put aside His royal wardrobe and dressed in human flesh, descended to the scene of the unspeakable disaster into which sin had plunged the whole of mankind. He came, not to be ministered unto but to minister, and His labour was a matter of pressing importance. He descended, not only to the earth, but into the horrible pit from whence we have been digged. From those very depths, a cry of His bleeding heart surged forth to be inscribed in the fadeless Record, “The pains of hell gat hold upon me” (Psalms 116:3). But He pressed on- on through the incomprehensible grapplings with sin and Satan beneath the burden of the unspeakable judgment of wrath which rightly was our due.

Then came the victorious word, “IT IS FINISHED!” The expiatory work was accomplished for us. “He saw us plunged in deep distress and flew to our relief. For us He bore the shameful cross and carried all our grief.” What a wonderful Saviour! His was a pressing purpose.

Into the chapel of a co-educational college in the east walked the dignified Christian president one morning with solemn mien. Following the opening hymn, he arose to address the student body. He told them about a telephone message which he had received just before leaving his office for the chapel service. A promising young man who had been graduated from that institution only three years previously had died suddenly during the night. The announcement was charged with solemnity. Then, pointing his finger slowly in a coverage of his congregation, the college president asked, “If all you desire to do, if all you hope to do, had to be crowded into three short years, would you do differently today?” The challenge struck home.

No one of us may have even three years to do all we desire before we meet the Saviour face to face, there may not be two years in which to accomplish it- perhaps not one.

Should we do differently today? This glimpse of the Lord Jesus should inspire us. We should see Him. And, remember, no one can see this lovely One and ever be the same. Either you will be better or worse for the vision. There He is-in a solitary but sacred place, engaged in an early and earnest prayer, with a positive and pressing purpose. He glorified purpose!

Keep looking unto Jesus-lest ye faint.

~ end of book ~

Chapter 62

04.00.1 Malachi, or Will A Man Rob God?

MALACHI or WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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Chapter 63

04.00.2 e-Sword Preface

Preface As an e-Sword user, and a resource creator, I always try to find quality works I believe will be beneficial to others in their studies. I hope this fits that description, and that all who use this module will find it to be a blessing. To Dr. David S. Thomason, Ed Sandlin, and Pamela Marshall, Thank You for all of your help in proofscanning, I couldn’t do it without you all. A special thanks to Virgil Butts from Baptist Bible Believers for providing the text. To see this book and many other wonderful Fundamental Christian works, check out his website. http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/ For more great e-Sword modules, visit http://doctordavet.com/index.html. Your Brother In Christ, Jason L. Briggs

04.00.3 Table Of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

00.4 PROLOGUE 01. THE LORD GOD’S LOVE QUESTIONED 02. THE LORD GOD’S NAME DISESTEEMED 03. THE LORD GOD’S WORSHIP CORRUPTED 04. THE LORD GOD’S ENTREATY REFUSED 05. THE LORD GOD’S TREASURY ROBBED 06. THE LORD GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY DENIED 07. THE THREE TENSES OF THE LORD’S SOVEREIGNTY

08. MESSIAH’S COMING IGNORED

04.00.4 Prologue

THE PROLOGUE

THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF MALACHI is authoritative for it is the Word of the living God (Malachi 1:1). It is urgent because it expresses a burden. It is condemnatory since it deals with the grievous conduct of the people. It is brief but incisive, pungent and provocative, cautionary and corrective. It reveals the love and patience of the Lord God, the faithfulness of the prophet and the stolid indifference of the nation.

The basic spiritual conditions presented in Malachi characterize the period just prior to the first advent of the Lord. These conditions bear a striking resemblance to those which are said to prevail previous to His second coming, giving current significance to the message.

The framework of the presentation is built around seven sad indignities which the people heaped upon the Lord God.

- They questioned His love (Malachi 1:2).

- They corrupted His worship (Malachi 1:7).

- They profaned His name (Malachi 1:12).

- They refused His entreaties (Malachi 3:7).

- They robbed His treasury (Malachi 3:8).

- They denied His sovereignty (Malachi 3:12).

- They rejected His Word (Malachi 3:14)

- They were ignoring the coming of Messiah (Malachi 4:2).

This is unbelief in its fullest manifestation. This is rebellion in its ultimate provocation.

“Ye say”, “ye said”, and “ye have said” occur thirteen times.

Thirteen has a numerical connotation of rebellion, and this was precisely the attitude of the people toward the heaven-sent message and toward the Lord personally. The self-opinionated and presumptive have little desire for divine Revelation. They give themselves to picking a path through the jungle of reason. They are destitute of spiritual perception and unacquainted with “the path of the just. . . that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

This was decadent Israel and Judah.

Spoken to the restored remnant after the 70 years’ captivity, it seems almost inconceivable that the message of Malachi should be met with inattention, indeed with obstinate rebellion, but such is the record.

They longed for the land more than for the Lord.

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning . . . let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem ABOVE MY CHIEF JOY” (Psalms 137:5-6) was the continuing emphasis. Their desire was for the physical, not the spiritual. They thought more of Jerusalem than of the Lord God.

It was a day of alarming spiritual declension. God’s messenger faced an incorrigible people, self-justifying, argumentative and grossly indifferent to divine directives. Without fear or favor, Malachi countered their harsh objections with his familiar introductory “Ye say.” He assailed the leadership for its blatant departure from the truth and for its careless inattention to God-given responsibility, saying, “And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you” (Malachi 2:1). He spoke with equal firmness to the people at large.

His was not the voice of sheer austerity, but rather of sincere concern and earnest entreaty. “And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us” (Malachi 1:9), is a choice example. The welfare of all was the burden of his heart, but he knew the people could not rise above the leadership.

Those who worship God must do so “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), and Malachi viewed with betrayed alarm the unscriptural and unacceptable procedure of the priests. He termed their offerings “polluted bread” upon the altar (Malachi 1:7), reminiscent of the “strange fire” offered by the sons of Aaron (Leviticus 10:1) which resulted in their untimely death by divine judgment.

The Lord desired first place in the affections of His people, but sadly revealed that, instead of the clusters, He received only “the grape gleanings of the vintage” (Micah 7:1). Concerning such pitiful disparity, still in evidence, Malachi asked pointedly if they would ingratiate themselves with some earthly dignitary by offering him such an unimpressive gift as they were presenting unto the Lord (Malachi 1:8). He branded them agents of deception and warned that divine judgment would be visited upon all such (Malachi 1:14).

Malachi had a comprehensive appreciation of the spiritual situation. He spoke of the southern kingdom as being “treacherous” in their sins against the Lord God, while the northern kingdom was “abominable” in its profanations and unholy alliances (Malachi 2:11). The cancer of unbelief had well nigh run its course. The spiritual condition was critical.

The prophet castigated the people for their unavailing pretense as they wept at the altar, then forgot God in their daily activities (Malachi 2:13). He saw only an insincere, external performance. He was a faithful messenger-devoted and dedicated, definite and determined, direct and decisive, daring and dauntless.

***

04.01 The Lord God's Love Questioned

CHAPTER ONE

THE LORD GOD'S LOVE QUESTIONED

Malachi 1:1-5 THE BOOK OF MALACHI has been spoken of as a late evening which brings a long day to a close. And what a day! It was characterized by ruthless disregard for the high and holy precepts of the Almighty. Spreading like a forest fire, rebellion against God reached the proportions of anarchy.

The burden of the word of the Lord (Malachi 1:1) denotes concern, urgency and grief. There have been references to the burden of Babylon (Isaiah 13:1), the burden of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:1), the burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach (Zechariah 9:1), and the burden of the word of the Lord for Israel (Zechariah 12:1). But the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi, in the light of the context and existing conditions, is, without doubt, a most magnificent manifestation of divine concern.

Though freighted with sublime importance, the word of the Lord nevertheless did not register in the distorted minds of those addressed. It was lightly dismissed as being of no particular interest. Their attitude, however, was not merely passive. They were argumentative in their unspiritual vindictiveness. They were quick to cavil and complain.

Without introduction or preamble, unlike most books, there is an immediate beginning of the message-a revelation of the heart of God. “I have loved you, saith the Lord” (Malachi 1:2).

With the fever of unbelief burning in their breasts, they asked blasphemously, “Wherein hast thou loved us?”

Thus they questioned the love of God.

This was the derailment which turned them into a perilous detour, and proved to be the forerunner of disaster. All divine favor toward men is predicated on love. Looking askance upon God’s love became the headwaters of a rising tide of serious indignities as God was robbed of devotion and man deprived of blessing.

It seems almost incredible that the Lord would dignify the unscrupulous query of the people by furnishing an answer, but herein is further evidence that His thoughts are higher than ours, even as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9).

He answers, “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? . . . yet I loved Jacob” (Malachi 1:2).

Then, in verses 3 and 4 (Malachi 1:3-4), it is shown how much Jacob and the Israelites were favored by the Lord God more than Esau and the Edomites. The people could not deny that divine intervention on their behalf was granted time and time again while Esau’s descendents were torn by wars and pestilences.

“I loved Jacob and I hated Esau” (Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13) is purely a Hebraism. It is using the negative to supply the want of the comparative. When two principles or matters or ideas are in mind, and the speaker or writer wishes to show the relative value, the negative is used for the inferior and the positive for the superior. Such is the construction here and in the following passages:

“When the Lord saw that Leah was hated” (loved less than Rachel by Jacob), He gave her power of conception and she bore four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (Genesis 29:31-35).

“If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated . . . he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn” (Deuteronomy 21:15; Deuteronomy 21:17).

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

In Malachi 1:2, we note:

(1) declaration-“I have loved you”;

(2) disputation-“Wherein hast thou loved us?” and

(3) affirmation-”I loved Jacob.”

Here the word “Jacob” is a plural noun, and the history of these ancient people is replete with the proof of the Lord God’s affection. Moses stated, “The Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them” (Deuteronomy 10:15). And further, “The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance . . . he kept him as the apple of his eye . . . the Lord alone did lead him” (Deuteronomy 32:9-10; Deuteronomy 32:12).

“But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen” (Isaiah 41:8).

Three servants of the Lord God are mentioned in Isaiah:

- David (Isaiah 37:35),

- Israel the Nation (Isaiah 41:8-16) and

- Messiah (Isaiah 42:1-12).

This proves how highly the Lord had exalted these people. That He held them in tender esteem is seen in the statement, “Thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee” (Isaiah 43:4).

If the “wherein” is a demand for proof of the divine assertion, let it be stated that they had a rich display of historical antecedents from which to draw an overwhelming list of evidential facts.

Take Joshua’s valedictory for instance. Summoning the leaders of Israel to Shechem shortly before his death, the great general delivered with convincing eloquence a rehearsal of the goodness of the Lord to the people of His love:

“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: . . . I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood . . . I multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau . . . I sent

Moses also and Aaron and I plagued Egypt . . . I brought you out . . . put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them . . . I brought you unto the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side of Jordan . . . I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land . . . I delivered you out of his [Balaam's] hand . . . I have given you a land for which ye planted not" (Joshua 24:1-13).

Still more comprehensive and persuasive is the rehearsal of the Lord God through the Psalmist concerning His wonderful works to the children of Israel (Psalms 103:1-22; Psalms 105:1-45; Psalms 106:1-48). The terse summation is thus expressed: "He saved them for His name's sake, . . . He led them through the depths . . . [He] redeemed them from the hand of the enemy" (Psalms 106:8-10).

The reaction of the people, just as tersely stated, was this: "Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel; but lusted exceedingly . . . and tempted God" (Psalms 106:12-14).

This is the status of God's covenant people in Malachi, only they were then in the advanced stages of spiritual malignancy.

The unchangeable God can never become accustomed to the indifference, ingratitude and disobedience of His people. He is ever grieved.

"What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" He demanded (Jeremiah 2:5).

"Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" He inquires further. Has He, like a desert, failed to furnish food and drink that they should be so pitifully desolate?

"I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" (Jeremiah 2:21).

This is perhaps the saddest of the Lord God's many inquiries.

Why should a noble vine produce such ignobility, and how could certified seed yield a degenerate plant? How can such monstrosities develop in the realm of spiritual profession? They are resultant hybrids of unbelief in a believer. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23).

The question, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" indicates an irritation on the part of the people which led them to accuse the Lord of failure to prove His love.

They had a bitter recollection of the attitudes and actions of the Edomites when Jerusalem was plundered by the Philistines and Arabians (2 Chronicles 21:16-17). These descendants of Esau were there aiding and abetting the enemy in the defeat of their brethren, and the Lord did not restrain them (Obadiah 1:11).

- They showed sadistic pleasure over Judah's misfortune by mocking at her calamities (Obadiah 1:12).

- They shared the spoils with the enemy when the city was captured (Obadiah 1:13).

- They assisted the enemy by blocking the retreat of refugees (Obadiah 1:14).

- They turned over to the insurgents those that could not escape (Obadiah 1:14).

Thus, in Judah's trying hours, the Edomites looked, laughed, insulted, robbed, trapped, and murdered because of their inherited hatred toward Jacob (and his posterity) for fraudulently obtaining the blessing.

The Lord's people carried a painful grievance concerning this. It was a festering sore in their memory. They recalled how their fathers, as captives, sitting along the rivers of Babylon, cried out, "Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psalms 137:7).

The question in Malachi's day is, in substance, "Why did God permit this if He loved us?"

Deity can never be on the defensive. God never needs to justify or explain His action or inaction, but He does deign to comfort the hearts of His people by reminders of the past, and to encourage them by prophecies of the future concerning His lovingkindnesses and tender mercies-His love for His own.

When their forefathers worshiped acceptably, the people went to their tents "glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the Lord had shewed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel his people" (2 Chronicles 7:10). Obedience could have restored this joyful estate at this late date, but the prevailing attitude precluded it.

When Jacob was greatly perturbed over the bitterness of his brother Esau, caused by his taking the birthright from him, God met Jacob in a marvelous way.

"Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children" (Genesis 32:11).

That night, Jacob the supplanter became "Israel, a prince with God" (Genesis 32:28).

He saw God face to face there at Penuel and knew that his life was preserved (Genesis 32:30). In the next scene, unbelievable as it may seem, "Esau ran to meet him [Jacob], and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him and they wept" (Genesis 33:4). Herein God showed His love for Jacob.

The people should have been conversant with the promises of the Lord God relative to His judgment on the Edomites.

"My sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea" (Isaiah 34:5).

"Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished" (Jeremiah 49:17).

"Therefore thus saith the Lord God; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate . . . I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel" (Ezekiel 25:13-14).

There are similar prophecies in Amos 1:11-12 and in Obadiah.

In Malachi 1:3, the Lord God said, “I . . . laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.”

The people’s complaint against God simmered down to the fact that the descendants of Esau, though impoverished, claimed they would return to prosperity; they would rebuild their desolate places (1:4). They apparently feared a rebuilt Idumea as the Russians of our day fear a restored and reunited Germany.

“But,” said the Lord through Malachi, “they shall build, but I will tear down” (Malachi 1:4).

The Lord promised that the Edomites would not extend their borders of wickedness. It must become universally known that they were the people against whom the Lord had indignation forever.

In spite of Jewish criticism and Edom’s claims, the Lord revealed that He would be magnified from the border of Israel (Malachi 1:5). “For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3).

How sadly may desperation becloud a picture and induce panic-even to the point of engendering doubts relative to God’s great love!

Nor does it require perplexing circumstances.

Passivity with its attendant apathy and irresponsibility, while not doubting the revelation of divine love, nevertheless questions its outreach.

God wants to love sinners through human instrumentality. This is one reason He has shed His love abroad in the hearts of believers (Romans 5:5). This was the overwhelming, overpowering dynamic in Paul’s tireless efforts, through indescribable hardship, to lay the gospel of Christ at the heart’s door of the lost (2 Corinthians 5:14).

To question God’s love is irreverence and blasphemy of a most serious nature.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

04.02 The Lord God's Name Disesteemed

CHAPTER TWO

THE LORD GOD'S NAME DISESTEEMED "O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, "Wherein have we despised thy name?" (Malachi 1:6).

TO SIN AGAINST LOVE is more reprehensible than sinning against law, though the latter is the result of the former and is not without seriousness.

Having questioned God's love, the people then displayed a disregard for His name.

The leadership-poor, proud and profligate-was severely charged in this connection, but quickly and brazenly countered with a self-justifying "Wherein have we despised thy name?"

The name of the Lord should appeal to every noble instinct in man's nature.

To disesteem it betrays an inward perversion; and to pretend otherwise when thus divinely charged is mockery. It is as ignoble as when Pilate claimed his innocence of Christ's death by washing his hands before the multitude. The extent to which they had declined spiritually in Malachi's day becomes evident when we recall that their forebears held God's name in such awe and reverence, sacredness and majesty, that they would not allow themselves to pronounce it. They alluded to the divine appellation as "the incommunicable name."

"I am the God of thy father . . . the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, and My name is I am" (Exodus 3:6; Exodus 3:14).

No other name can possess so much dignity, sublimity and transcendence. The root idea in the "I am" is that of underived and independent existence. It connotes eternality and unchangeableness.

As the Lord, God is the self-existent, supreme and sovereign Will. There is nothing transitory or successive about Him. There cannot be since change is the consequence of imperfection.

Following is a terse rundown on the significance of divine titles.

Jehovah-Elyon Jehovah-jireh Jehovah-M'Kaddesh Jehovah-nissi Jehovah-rohi Jehovah-rophe Jehovah-shalom Jehovah-shammah Jehovah-Sabaoth Jehovah-tsidkenu

"The Lord most high"

"The Lord will provide"

"The Lord that doth sanctify you" "The Lord thy banner"

"The Lord is my shepherd"

"The Lord that healeth thee"

"The Lord our peace"

“The Lord is there”

“The Lord of hosts”

“The Lord our righteousness”

Psalms 7:17

Genesis 22:14

Exodus 31:13

(Exodus 17:15

(Psalms 23:1)

(Exodus 15:26)

(Judges 6:24)

(Ezekiel 48:35)

(1 Samuel 1:3) (Jeremiah 23:6; Jeremiah 33:16)

The above titles of Deity, suggesting greatness, holiness, perfection, faithfulness, inexhaustibleness, fullness of mercy, permanence, majesty, righteousness, graciousness and uniformity, are expressive of God’s attributes bearing upon His essential nature and essential relations.

They denote His wisdom, justice and love. They call for honor and fervor of an orderly and sober character, but now the day has come when even the leadership must be charged with taking lightly this all-important name. The absurdity of such conduct is seen in the folly and misery occasioned by forsaking God.

And to forget Him, as another has said, is:

“(1) not to think of Him,

(2) not to thank Him,

(3) not to serve and obey Him.

It is to forget:

(1) His presence,

(2) His providence,

(3) His precepts.”

To disesteem His name is the forerunner of these dangerous divergencies. For those who thus turn, hoping to find wider circuits of power or larger fields of opportunity or greater extents of prosperity face an inevitable disillusionment which will prove too severe to bear.

A SAD INQUIRY

“Where is mine honor?” (Malachi 1:6).

A name-despising nation could not be an honor-producing people, and the divine inquiry is as pitiful as it is pointed. Honor has a most prominent place in God’s dealings with men and men’s dealings with God. At an earlier date, it was explicitly stated, “[They] that honour me, I will honour” (1 Samuel 2:30).

Honor shown to parents by the respectful attitude and conduct of children has ever been the cornerstone of happy family life and is the symbol of reverence and devotion to the Most High.

Now, however, the Lord must observe that such honor for Him is not forthcoming. Disesteeming His name accounts for this lamentable indignity.

That the divine question was met with an evasive counter-question evidencing rebellion instead of repentance is but one of the unsightly colors in this picture of spiritual deterioration.

It is not here a denial of sovereignty, but it is a step toward such a disastrous end.

“O man, who art thou that repliest against God?” (Romans 9:20).

It is apparent that one of the symptoms of backsliding is insensibility toward spiritual values, an inappreciation which throws the heart’s door wide open to carnal interests and worldly appeal. And where was God s honor? It was a missing quality in the lives of His people.

GREATNESS OF NAME UNAFFECTED

As the veracity and power of God’s Word cannot be depreciated by unbelief, even so the greatness of God’s name cannot be diminished by dishonor.

“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 1:11).

“From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the Lord’s name is to be praised” (Psalms 113:3).

“I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon my name” (Isaiah 41:25).

“So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun” (Isaiah 59:19).

This last reference makes clear that the expression “from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same” means (literally) from east to west, conveying the thought of universality.

The three verses, respectively, call for adoration, praise and reverence for the name of the Lord. Regardless of the disesteem of God’s people for His name and the disrespect of the unbelieving world, the day of universal triumph for that Name is assured:

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Php 2:10).

In the meanwhile, there is unapproachable prominence to that Name, because “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Php 2:9).

In the meanwhile, as well, there is inexplicable profit in that Name:

- There is salvation (Acts 4:12).

- There is forgiveness (1 John 2:12).

- There is worship (Matthew 18:20).

- There is prayer (John 15:16).

- There is operating authority for words and deeds (Colossians 3:17).

How irrefutable is the proof that His name is WONDERFUL (Isaiah 9:6).

WORTHY IS HIS NAME

“In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering” (Malachi 1:11).

While couched in ceremonial language, appropriate for the day, the practical import is that of sincerity, esteem and reverence for His name.

Between the place of sacrifice and the Holy of Holies was the altar of incense. This was always pleasing to the Lord God when the incense was proper and the lire not strange. But when was the incense proper? There were four requirements.

First, It must be sweet: “And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning” (Exodus 30:7).

Second, it must be pure: “And he made the holy anointing oil, and the pure incense of sweet spices” (Exodus 37:29).

Third, it must be perpetual (Exodus 30:8).

Fourth, it must be unto the Lord: “It is most holy unto the Lord” (Exodus 30:10).

The Name of the Lord, being both sweet and pure, demands and deserves unalloyed and unaffected esteem. No voice can sing, no heart can frame, Nor can the mem’ry find,

A sweeter sound than Thy blest Name, O Saviour of mankind.

Yet the priests profaned it. And this in spite of its effectual and indispensable place in covenant blessing and promise.

- It was the hallowed watermark of relationship: “If my people, who are called by my name . . .” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

- It was the guarantee of protection: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

- It was the assurance of victory. “I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts . . . This day will the Lord deliver thee [Goliath] into mine hand” (1 Samuel 17:45-46).

While it is obvious the people of Malachi's day suffered irreparably as have their descendants, because of disesteeming and profaning the Lord God's name, it would be unmitigated blindness if we could not see the Lord's grief in the question He put to them.

He was deprived in three ways:

(1) He did not receive the honor a father should be accorded by his children.

(2) He did not receive the obedience servants give to their masters.

(3) He was not shown the reverence rightly due Deity.

Yet for all this, "the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake" (1 Samuel 12:22).

His name remains and ever will remain unchangeably and unchallengeably worthy!

A GREAT NAME AND DREADFUL

"My name shall be great among the heathen" (Malachi 1:11 c).

"My name is dreadful among the heathen" (Malachi 1:14 c).

Because God is infinite, incomparable and transcendent, it naturally obtains that He is unique in nature, attribute and title. He did not become great. As the eternally self-sufficient One, He does not inherit or derive. His name is great because He is great.

The nations must learn the greatness of His Name; and, indeed, they shall! "Why do the heathen [nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" (Psalms 2:1) is a question of considerable current importance.

It envisions a world in revolt-the rebellion of nations. The open issue, which will prove to be an empty dream, finds a block of nations whose rulers conspire to destroy all that is of the Lord. It is then that the greatness of His Name becomes painfully realistic to them for "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Psalms 2:4).

Confidence in the integrity of divine Truth must convince one that nothing is out of control with the Lord. When, in His wise counsels, it is propitious to act, God will move to set things right. When it becomes Him to speak, He will glorify His Name in so doing. As in creation, God stayed the boisterous waves with "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job 38:11), even so shall the raging nations be curbed, discomfited, destroyed. The Lord is His Name!

When Jehovah-Sabaoth says, "My name is dreadful among the nations" (Malachi 1:14 c), it is implied that the greatness of His Name does not need to wait for future demonstration to prove the fact. It is already proved.

Pharaoh, both in Egypt and at the Red Sea, was thus convinced, as were Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in their day. The demonstration to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel was phenomenal. The word "dreadful" means "to hold in awe." Nebuchadnezzar was particularly awed when Daniel recovered his lost dream and gave the interpretation thereof. How did Daniel do it? Listen to his prayer: "Blessed be the NAME of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his" (Daniel 2:20).

HIS NAME TO BE MAGNIFIED

“If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you” (Malachi 2:2).

“To give glory” means “to laud”, “to magnify.” There are some interesting involvements. First, the prerequisites: To hear or give careful attention is demanded; serious reaction by laying it to heart is strongly enjoined. The former concerned the instruction; the latter, the engagement. Second, the warning for failure: “I will even send a curse upon you” (Malachi 2:2).

Magnifying His name is a form of praise, a spiritual engagement in extolling the Most High. It solicits association: “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Psalms 34:3). It calls for royal etiquette: “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving . . . let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker . . . sing unto the Lord, bless his name . . . give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name . . . O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Psalms 95:2; Psalms 95:6; Psalms 96:2; Psalms 96:8-9).

The warning God sounded for failure to magnify His Name with sincerity of heart, that of a curse, emphasizes the fact that this is indeed an important matter with the Lord. To disesteem His Name spells failure in every area of one’s life. This must be guarded against vigilantly and the reproof is God’s red light to prevent transgression. His Name is great!

HONORING GOD’S NAME

“My covenant was with him [Levi] of life and peace . . . he feared me, and was afraid before my name” (Malachi 2:5).

The Levites were those that did “execute the service of the Lord” (Numbers 8:11). They were set aside for divine service and proved exemplary to no small degree. The mention of Levi in 2:4 has reference to Aaron who was of the tribe of Levi. “Behold, I give unto him [Aaron] my covenant of peace “(Numbers 25:12), which was “the covenant of an everlasting priesthood” (Numbers 25:13). The Lord God took notice that Aaron was “zealous for my sake” (Numbers 25:11) and “zealous for his God” (Numbers 25:13).

Now the Lord reveals Aaron’s attitude toward His name. He was afraid (2:5). The word “afraid” means “to prostrate” hence, “to break down, either (literally) by violence, or (figuratively) by confusion and fear” (Strong’s Conc.). Since the reference in Malachi 2:4-5 connects with Numbers 25:1-18, one may readily see why the faithful priesthood exhibited pronounced concern.

It was at the time of God’s judgment against the people for their sinful involvements of Baal-peor. So hideous and sordid was the sin that an exact description is scarcely discoverable. “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel” (Numbers 25:3), and twenty-four thousand were destroyed (Numbers 25:9), twenty-three thousand in one day (1 Corinthians 10:8). Only those were spared “that did cleave unto the Lord” (Deuteronomy 4:4). It was Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron who ended the plague (Numbers 25:7) by thrusting a javelin through two remaining offenders, thereby turning divine wrath from the children of Israel (Numbers 25:11).

Now, some 1155 years later, the Lord God cites this incident to reveal His pleasure in those who revere His Name and stand unswervingly for its glory and praise when the vast majority; with no

evident compunction, are bringing reproach upon it.

The reference to Levi (Malachi 2:5), that is the ministering priests of another day, is an intended comparison developing a sad contrast.

- Once God's servants were "zealous for my sake" (Numbers 25:11). Now they question His love (Malachi 1:2).

- Once they were "zealous for God" (Numbers 25:13). Now they despise His Name (Malachi 1:6).

The late Dr. Wm. L. Pettingill, shortly before his decease, made mention of the godly dauntless, set-for-the-defense-of-the-faith leaders with whom he had rubbed shoulders for fifty years. Then, in homely but expressive language he observed, "The present crop is not made of the same stuff." And so it was in Malachi's day.

NAME PONDERED BY GOD-FEARING

"A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16).

What mental engagement could be so pleasant and profitable?

"Jesus, the very thought of Thee

With sweetness fills my breast."

We may think upon His name regarding His love, His providences, His guidance, His protection, His promises. It was for such a cause that Joshua called upon the leaders to assemble at Shechem (Joshua 24:1-33).

His rehearsal of the goodness and grace of God should have elicited much favorable reaction; but, apart from Joshua and his family, none seemed sufficiently impressed to declare full dedication to the Lord.

Just a casual glance at the above verse (Malachi 3:16) will reveal that only those who fear the Lord ponder with any real seriousness the transcendence and glory of that Name.

- The ritualist employs it.

- The materialist mentions it.

- The carnal-minded will acknowledge it.

But only the God-fearing will laud and magnify it and be motivated and controlled by it. These are evidently comparatively few in number, especially in decadent days.

Further comment will be made concerning the book of remembrance in a later chapter. Suffice it to state here that divine pleasure is specifically indicated concerning those who ponder His name prayerfully and appreciatively.

THE NAME AND THE FUTURE

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2).

This is a climactic statement. It was the ultimate of Jewish hope-the anticipation of the prophets.

The name of the Sun of righteousness was amplified in His incarnation: “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

- His Name was qualified in the annunciation: “Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

- His Name will be glorified in His Revelation: “His name is called The Word of God . . . and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:13; Revelation 19:16).

In this hallowed Name is:

- The hope of the saint,

- The fear of the sinner,

- The end of the nations,

- The glory of Israel and

- The destruction of Satan.

This is the Name the priests despised and the people disesteemed, grieving the heart of the Lord God and moving the nation into darkness and despair.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

04.03 The Lord God's Worship Corrupted

CHAPTER THREE

THE LORD GOD'S WORSHIP CORRUPTED "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar" (Malachi 1:7).

"GOD IS SPIRIT: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). It is not conceivable, therefore, that those who bluntly question His love and unabashedly disesteem His name could worship God acceptably. Nor did they.

The word "worship", derived largely from "worth" (worthiness), became used to denote honor or reverence of which one was regarded as worthy. It speaks of deference, supreme respect and veneration. As a verb, it means to pay honor or reverence, or to show homage. In a spiritual sense, it is to be regarded as a sacred attitude and solemn expression of devotion for the Most High on the part of His acknowledged people.

THE MISSING ESSENTIAL

The practice was pursued-"Ye offer" (Malachi 1:7).

There was no dearth of activity. They had their scheduled meetings, their appointed feasts, new moons and seasons. Religious programs may be most impressive in the eyes of men with no glory whatsoever accruing unto the Lord. Recently I asked a pastor about his church, to which he replied, "We are operating but not producing." It is an apt description of the people in Malachi's day.

As apostasy increases, worship becomes more meaningless to the masses of humanity, but the practice is religiously continued. The crucifixion of Christ was hurried because the passover feast was at hand and the people reasoned that they could better worship if the Son of God were disposed of. Fifty days later they gathered at Jerusalem from some sixteen different nations, but mocked when the Spirit of God manifested Himself.

People universally have some type of worship even though superstition, ritualism and rationalism eclipse the true and living God.

The place was proper-"Upon mine altar" (Malachi 1:7).

Moses received detailed specifications on the mount regarding the Tabernacle. This was particularly true concerning the Brazen Altar (Exodus 27:1-8). The word "altar" in our text, however, seems to denote, not a particular part of worship, but worship in its entirety. Thus the people assembled regularly even as multitudes do today, more as a custom than through conviction-more as a habit than through heartfelt devotion.

Almost every community has its place of worship. People find ways and means to erect edifices ranging from small chapels to magnificent cathedrals. These, in themselves, cannot assure

worship. Liturgy and ceremony may be devoid of reality, as may be the repulsive informality of irreverence. The One to be worshiped must be present (Matthew 18:20), recognized and acknowledged.

In the early days, the Lord God's glory was with Israel in the Shekinah. However, the irresponsibility and disobedience of the people forced a departure.

"Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house" (Ezekiel 10:4).

"Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house" (Ezekiel 10:18).

"And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city" (Ezekiel 11:23).

It was a reluctant withdrawal but the Lord God removed His presence from the insincere worshipers. Despite the beautiful anthems and pleasing oratory, the meeting place is an empty place if God is not there.

The procedure was wrong-"polluted" (Malachi 1:7).

The Lord had many times previously reproved the people for impiety and impropriety.

"When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?" (Isaiah 1:12).

And later, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Isaiah 29:13).

Again, "What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many" (Jeremiah 11:15).

And yet again, "To what Purpose cometh there to me incense? . . . Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me" (Jeremiah 6:20).

Before undertaking to worship, God's people need to learn two things.

First, that "the gift without the giver is bare."

The saints at Macedonia had learned this. They "first gave their ownselves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

Second, what God does not authorize He cannot approve; what He cannot approve, He will not accept. To engage in a form of worship without the essential spirit and truth is not only profitless to those who so carelessly proceed, but from God's point of view it is a pollution (desecration, defilement). This was the divine charge.

INDICTMENT REGISTERED

The Remonstrance

The official note handed by the Lord's ambassador to these rebellious people was stern and convicting:

“Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar . . . Ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible . . . If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?” (Malachi 1:7-8).

“The table of the Lord” (Malachi 1:7) is not the table of showbread (Exodus 25:23). It is “the table that is before the Lord” (Ezekiel 41:22, last line). It is the altar of incense (Exodus 30:1) and is highly symbolical of worship. The complaint does not focus primarily upon the imperfect offerings but rather upon the imperfect heart attitude of the offerers.

Dealing with God is ever a matter of the heart. A divided heart is not acceptable. Hearts invaded by idols are disqualified for worship. Hearts that are insincere are rejected. “They have not cried unto me with their heart” (Hosea 7:14), the Lord God charged.

Then, too, true worship is withheld because personalities are allowed to hinder.

- Jeremiah was a pessimist and an alarmist.

- Hosea was a fool and mad.

- Paul’s bodily appearance was obnoxious and his speech contemptible.

These are the impressions which prejudiced the people and closed their ears to the heaven-sent message. What they needed was to see the Lord as did Isaiah, and trust Him as did Job.

What we need so greatly in our day is to “keep looking unto Jesus”, to “see no man save Jesus only.”

The Resentment

“Wherein have we polluted thee?” was the quick retort-a vigorously implied innocence of the self-justifying worshipers. This follows a long-established pattern. When God warned the people through Jeremiah against their lack of spiritual perception and their violated orthodoxy, their resentment was voiced in this fashion: “Let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words” (Jeremiah 18:18 b).

- In Jeremiah 26:8, they threatened God’s servant with death.

- In Jeremiah 37:16, Jeremiah is in prison-all because he conveyed the Lord’s message of displeasure to them.

How immediate and intense would be the reaction today if the superficial multitudes were to be told their worship is a delusion, that, with a mere form of godliness, they are denying themselves the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5).

Religion so-called in our day has suffered a wide divergence from the early New Testament position. Denominational pride, hereditary influence, associational ties, personal preferences, representative solicitation, apart from Holy Spirit guidance, have combined to give a somber cast to the spiritual life of our day.

One wonders at the patience of God, “Ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible” (Malachi 1:7). Uttered or unexpressed, this was their feeling about the prescribed means and manner of worship.

The flesh (self-life) is so deceitful as to abhor, not only what God approves, but what He actually designs and desires. Because they had some inclination to worship and because they actually thus engaged themselves, the word “contemptible” may seem overly strong as here employed. But not so. God knows hearts (John 2:25 b). God has commanded worship (Matthew 4:10). He desires worship (John 4:23). No other word could so perfectly describe their attitude. “Contemptible” here means “to relegate to unimportance”, “to make nothing of”, “to set at nought,” “to think to scorn”, and this was most grievous to the Lord God.

The Lord is to be worshiped “in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalms 29:2; Psalms 96:9).

The beauty of holiness is nowhere so acceptably revealed as in obedience to God’s will and way. Innovations, modifications and adaptations are the fruit of self-opinion, therefore meaningless to and rejected of God.

How different would be the whole picture were we, as Andrew Murray, to pray:

“Teach me, O Lord, how holy Thou art

That I may know

How holy Thou dost want me to be”

(cf. 1 Peter 1:16).

Or, were we, with Robert Murray McCheyne, diligently to prepare the heart and mind on Saturday evening to meet the Lord in worship the day following.

Self-examination demanded.

“Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord” (Malachi 1:8).

The Spirit of God would never exhort people to examine themselves to see if they be in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5) if there were not available measuring rods.

Here is a practical test.

God desired the firstripe fruit but received only the gleanings (Micah 7:1). He asked that the animals for the sacrifice be without spot or blemish (Numbers 19:2), that they not be blind and lame (Deuteronomy 15:21), yet He now receives the worthless.

Selfishness and personal gain are reflected in their flagrant violation of divine precept. They could sell the perfect creatures, so they sacrificed the imperfect. They would not offer such as a gift to an earthly dignitary. It would be an affront to present to him something valueless.

When the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon “she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the Queen of Sheba gave; to king Solomon” (1 Kings 10:10).

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower made his eastern goodwill tour (1960), there preceded his jet plane another aircraft heavily loaded with gifts for the leaders of nations whom he planned to

meet. A committee in Washington gave scrupulous attention to each such gift as to protocol, as to desirability, as to worthiness, as to value. Yet the people of Malachi's day brought to the infinite God animals for sacrifice which were blind, sick and lame.

A NEEDFUL EXHORTATION

"And now, I pray you," said Malachi the messenger, "beseech God that he will be gracious unto us" (Malachi 1:9).

If they had thus sincerely prayed, no supplication could have been more appropriate. It was time for a repentant people to confess their grievous mistake and to seek divine forgiveness. The offense should have been confessed. There is no question that this was in order, for Malachi adds, "This hath been by your means."

That is to say, "You, the people, have done this thing. You went to the field. You deliberately ferreted out the sick and dying animals. You brazenly conveyed them to the place of worship. You presented them as a gift to the Most High, all the while recognizing their worthlessness."

Speaking for the Lord, Malachi asks, "Will he [God] regard your persons [when you have so confessed]?" The answer is "Yes." Should they not so confess, the answer would be "No."

That they refused to turn their hearts heavenward; that they did not so confess; that they did not seek God's favor is pathetically evident. This posed a serious threat to their spiritual well-being. Man is ever reluctant to do things in God's way. Confession is clearly required for restoration (Hosea 14:1-2; 1 John 1:9), yet this is one of the last things a guilty one is willing to do.

DIVINE DISAPPROVAL EMPHASIZED

"I would that one among you would shut the doors [of the temple] that no more vain fire should kindle on mine altar" (Malachi 1:10 marg. See also Isaiah 1:11).

The Calamity of Feigned Worship

The Lord is here revealing that it would be better not to attempt to worship than in doing so to pursue unauthorized measures which only incur divine Wrath. Closed doors are preferred to pretense. This is doubly true because open doors in such persistence would have a continuing harmful effect upon younger generations. How terrible is an epidemic of apostasy! Darkness of unbelief grows denser and denser. When one generation fails spiritually, the failure will be greater with the succeeding generation.

The only thing that can change spiritual decline is a heaven-sent, Holy Spirit revival to lift God's people back to a loftier plane.

It is gravely doubtful that our children will be able to sing with honesty, "Faith of our fathers living still." Then will not be much from us to encourage and challenge them unless we sink the roots of our faith deeper into the soil of Truth and engage in daring exploits for the Lord. The fact that the curtain went up on the New Testament scene to reveal a people who had no room for Messiah, no desire for His message and no compunction in calling for His crucifixion is all traceable to conditions right here in the Book of Malachi.

The patience of God is the greatest mystery of any day. As long as they maintained even a faint regard for the divine instructions, the Lord, who is slow to anger, bore patiently with them.

However, the testimony of the people never became prominently strong. Indeed, there were times when it seemed the pulse of spiritual devotion had all but ceased. Such was this day.

God told Isaiah to cry with a full-throated voice, sparing not in showing them their sins (Isaiah 58:1). He commanded Jeremiah to go into their midst and urge upon them to amend their ways and their doings (Jeremiah 7:1-3). Now He must reveal through Malachi, “I have no pleasure in you . . . neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Malachi 1:10). Unbelief had wrought its havoc.

The Plunge of Intellectual Pride

“Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 1:13).

It is never a reflection upon one’s intellect to take God at His Word. It is, on the other hand, intellectual suicide to question the precepts of Him “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

The word “snuffed” speaks of intellectual snobbery-the inflated ego disesteeming the counsel of God, presuming that God’s way is not best, and implying that man’s way is more acceptable. It is the philosophy of Cain which has been espoused throughout the ages by the unbelieving heart.

The reason they “snuffed at it” (God’s way) was due to what they considered burdensome procedure in the ceremonial requirements. “What weariness it is!” was their lament. Paul served with his spirit in the gospel (Romans 1:9) and finished his course with joy. These people served in the flesh and became wearied and mournful (Malachi 3:14).

Intellectual snobbery in objection to divine precept is usually manifested with “I think” or “I have a right to my opinion!” This is never productive of good.

“Take heed therefore that the light which ls in thee be not darkness” (Luke 11:35). Deception comes under the curse (Malachi 1:14), and one who deliberately and wittingly offers to God anything but the best that he possesses is deceptive, especially when, like Ananias and Sapphira, one “voweth” or presents what he knows is not acceptable or true.

David had set an impressive example when Araunah, the Jebusite, asked him to accept oxen as a gift for his burnt-offering. Israel’s sweet singer replied resolutely, “Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). What a contrast has thus developed!

A missionary related how he passed a mother sitting by the then raging Ganges River. By her side was a healthy little boy; in her arms a sickly child. Upon his return, she was still sitting there, the child in her arms, the little boy missing. In conversation, the missionary learned the lady sacrificed her healthy child to appease her heathen god by casting him into the turbulent river. When he asked why she did not offer the sickly child, her reply was, “I give of my best to my god.”

It is reasonable to conclude that God's people in Malachi's day were less devout than such predecessors as David and not even as devoted to Him as the heathen were to their lifeless idols.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

04.04 The Lord God's Entreaty Refused

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LORD GOD'S ENTREATY REFUSED

"Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?" (Malachi 3:7).

"HIS COMPASSIONS FAIL NOT" (Lamentations 3:22). The Record is replete with this wonderful truth. Here in our text it is especially appealing.

In spite of their persistent rebellion and multiplying indignities, the Lord God wanted His people back in fellowship with Him. Each spokesman for God was authorized and instructed to make this fact prominent in his pronouncements to the people. A greater proof of everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) for His own is nowhere more clearly revealed.

- Amos urged a preparedness to meet God (Amos 4:12).

- Isaiah pleaded for the people to reason with the Lord (Isaiah 1:18).

- Jeremiah exhorted a halt, and an inquiry for the old paths and a return to the good way (Jeremiah 6:16).

- Ezekiel, as a watchman on a wall, was to warn the "righteous man [that] doth turn from his righteousness" (Ezekiel 3:20).

- Hosea appealed, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord" (Hosea 6:1).

This was the outreach of love to the rebellious. God kept the door open always for their return. THE REACTION

"Wherein shall we return?" they said (Malachi 3:7).

This is indifference and not innocence. It is rebellion and not ignorance. It betrays an unwillingness to obey and a desire for the status quo. It likewise denotes impenitence and persistence. But their question does not go unanswered.

Sincere or in sincere, desirous of an answer or not desirous there is a copious explanation.

Any sincere person who possesses spiritual life is or can become convictingly aware of sin in his life. One needs but glance at the high and holy standard of righteousness contained in the Bible.

The honest one will cry with Isaiah, "Woe unto me, for I am undone!" Or, with Job, "I abhor myself." Or, with Paul, "O wretched man that I am!" Then with the desire of the helpless leper, one will appeal, "Make me clean" (Mark 1:40). The record states that this leper was cleansed. It is encouraging proof of what awaits those who will come to grips with God, acknowledge their need and trust Him for the cleansing.

But Malachi's people pretended to be unconscious of any need to return to the Lord.

It reminds of the weeping Indian boy who when asked if he was lost, said, "I'm not lost; the wigwam is lost." The attitude of these people is about as senseless and immature. "Wherein?" they asked, or, in other words, "Give us an example!" The reader will note that reasons had already been given. Following are a few:

1. DEPARTURE

"Ye are departed out of the way" (Malachi 2:8).

Surely this is sufficient reason for a return. But a backslider seemingly can get so accustomed to his waywardness that it becomes the norm of his life. This is the chief danger in departure from God's way. It commences with a tendency, continues with carelessness and culminates in a habit (Hosea 11:7). The longer the return is delayed, the longer revival is refused, the more one is confirmed in his ill-chosen condition.

The serious feature about a backslidden state is that others are adversely affected thereby. "Ye have caused many to stumble" (Malachi 2:8), the Lord sadly added to His already weighty indictment.

Here we return to the contrast which is cited between the Levitical priesthood and the present leadership. "He [Aaron] walked with me in peace and equity" (Malachi 2:6). Now the priests depart out of the way (Malachi 2:8). Aaron "did turn many away from iniquity" (Malachi 2:6). Now they cause many to stumble (Malachi 2:8).

Then the Lord reminds that:

(1) "the priest's lips should keep knowledge" (Malachi 2:7). That is, his Message should be orthodox, elevating, encouraging, profitable.

(2) "They should seek the law at his mouth" (Malachi 2:7 b), indicating that he should be in high repute, that he should have an influence for God, that his message should be wanted by the sincere people.

(3) "He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7 c), a spokesman for God. The New Testament description is most expressive: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ . . . we pray you in Christ's stead" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

"The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips" (Malachi 2:6 a).

This is the divine testimony regarding a faithful servant of another day. But times had changed. The enemy had been active-and effective. In Jeremiah's day, we read, "The prophets prophesy falsely" (Jeremiah 5:31). Then the people succumbed to this insidious thing: "Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit" (Jeremiah 7:8), said the servant of God.

The situation became progressively worse until, it would seem, they had reached the point of no return in Malachi's day. "Wherein shall we return?" was their indifferent remark.

2. DISOBEDIENCE

“Ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law” (Malachi 2:9).

Here is another expressed need for a return.

God’s ways are one; man’s quite another, and those who do not keep God’s ways are pursuing their own. This is transgression, and the way of the transgressor is hard. Most people must learn this from experience, and the sons of Jacob have already paid dearly for not keeping the ways of the Lord.

That they had “been partial in the law” (Malachi 2:9) allows little room for speculation.

The facts plainly in view lay the whole picture before us. They had not repudiated the law. They did not disavow its existence, its sacredness, or its Author. They simply became self-opinionated concerning its precepts, superimposing their own interpretations and granting themselves leniency and latitude in applying it to their lives.

They found no sympathy with Jeremiah’s confession that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). When the Lord God said the animal for sacrifice must not be lame or blind or sick, they decided that this was not to be taken literally, so they brought the sickly, worthless creatures (Malachi 1:8). This kind of attitude put a great difference and distance between them and the Lord.

“Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people” (Malachi 2:9 a) was a prediction which history has proved by their not-yet-ended sorrow.

In their dispersion, it was prophesied that they would become a proverb and a byword (jibe, taunt) universally (Deuteronomy 28:37, 1 Kings 9:7, 2 Chronicles 7:20). It is not commendable on the part of anyone to cast aspersions upon them, and certainly Christians should never thus he guilty, but the invectives have been heaped upon them. Even today anti-Semitism is rife. In Dachau, and perhaps in other concentration camps in Germany, their captors scarred their flesh by extinguishing cigarettes on them. Six million suffered and died under the heel of Hitler. Why? They kept not the ways of the Lord, yet saw no need to return.

3. TREACHERY

“Why do we deal treacherously, every man against his brother?” (Malachi 2:10) the prophet inquired in his desire to help them. Although he himself was not guilty on this score, he speaks from the standpoint of the nation collectively.

The record is sadly discolored with treachery, and what they reap is what they sowed. What prophet was not reduced to bleak discouragement resultant from their maltreatment? Take Ezekiel, for instance. “I send thee to the children of Israel,” the Lord explained, “to a rebellious nation . . . thou dost dwell among scorpions” (Ezekiel 2:3; Ezekiel 2:6). They cast Jeremiah into prison. Isaiah, tradition has it, was sawed asunder. “They were stoned . . . slain with the sword . . . afflicted, tormented” (Hebrews 11:37).

It was these people who demanded the crucifixion of Christ, and stoned Stephen and beat Paul. This hideous record of treachery against their brethren was begun against Joseph. “Come now therefore,” the sons of Jacob said, “and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit” (Genesis

37:20). “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” asked Stephen in his blistering indictment of Jewish leaders as he himself was about to be martyred.

Malachi asks, “Have we not all one father?” (Malachi 2:10).

Were they not all the descendants of Jacob? Were they not the covenant people of the Lord God? Why then such inhuman treatment of their own? The answer is given: “By profaning the covenant of our fathers” (Malachi 2:10 c).

Those who disesteem God’s Word become susceptible to divers temptations. They walk in darkness and plunge into serious pitfalls. This accounts for their treachery, but they would not return.

4. PROFANATION

“Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord” (Malachi 2:11).

When Judah is thus charged, it is indicative of the total depravity of the people. Israel, the northern kingdom, went into apostasy before Judah and thus suffered dispersion the sooner.

“I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel,” the Lord God had said some 300 years earlier, “but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah” (Hosea 1:6-7).

Meanwhile, the southern kingdom (Judah) deteriorated spiritually and fell into the hands of the enemy. King Zedekiah had his eyes thrust out, and he and the people were carried into Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 52:1-34). Seventy years of trial, divine favor granted in restoring the remnant to the land, and the godly leadership of Nehemiah had little or no effect so far as their spiritual rehabilitation was concerned. They profaned God’s holiness!

To profane is to treat with sacrilege or irreverence-to prostitute. This they had done, as people, concerning peace-offerings (Leviticus 19:8] Sabbaths (Ezekiel 22:8), the sanctuary (Ezekiel 25:3), and His holy name (Ezekiel 36:20). But to thus regard divine holiness is to literally touch God himself. He is the Holy One (Psalms 89:18) He is the thrice-holy One (Isaiah 6:3). Their manifest disobedience, rebellion and obstinacy had put them in this perilous condition. Yet they asked “Wherein should we return?”

5. IDOLATRY

“Judah hath profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god” (Malachi 2:11 b).

Here is, statedly, a departure from their “first love”, an alienation of affection, a diversionary focus of devotion. It infers that there was a day when Judah was not merely enamored of the holiness, majesty, splendor and effulgent glory of the Lord God, but was devoutly attached to and thoroughly engrossed in the worship of the Most High extolling exultantly His glorious attributes. The song of Moses is an example in point.

He sang of God’s right hand becoming glorious) in power and of the greatness of His excellency (Exodus 15:6-7). Then in impressive doxology he exulted, “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus

15:11). Now has this commendable emphasis suffered, suffered so grossly that this glorious holiness, the song of Seraphs' tongues, the anthem of the ancients, is being profaned-treated with disesteem.

Nor was this resultant from lack of instruction.

The voice of Moses, God's spokesman to His people, rang down the corridors of time, saying, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one [plural unity] Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God .with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Love begets love. "We love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

"He that loveth not [God] knoweth not God" (1 John 4:8). These people questioned His love (Malachi 1:2) and knew Him not (Jeremiah 4:22) and loved Him not.

They "married the daughter of a strange god" (Malachi 2:11).

- This is displaced love.

- This is spiritual adultery (Hosea 7:4).

- This is complicity with evil.

- This was a ruthless violation of one of the Lord God's Strongest prohibitions: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

But what does the record show?

"And they set them up images" (2 Kings 17:10).

Incredible? Seemingly. But unbelief pursues Furious courses. Those who become dissatisfied with the divine way will invariably find substitutions which appeal in their disobedient hearts.

- They procured images;

- They placed them on high hills;

- They proceeded to burn incense;

- They patterned their course after the heathen;

- They provoked the Lord to anger.

The Lord's eyes, too pure to behold evil, witnessed such pathetic sights as:

- His people dancing about a golden calf (Exodus 32:19),

- His people worshiping the queen of heaven, though non-existent (Jeremiah 7:18),

- The leaders gazing on and offering incense to the grotesque caricatures on the temple wall (Ezekiel 8:10-11);

- The women weeping over Tammuz whom the heathen represented as the son of the queen of heaven (Ezekiel 8:14).

With unspeakable idolatry blemishing their history and making odious their present experience, they claim no need to return to the Lord (Malachi 3:7).

6. AFFECTATION

“And this have ye done again [and again], covering the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping, and with crying out” (Malachi 2:13).

Tears may have a certain eloquence. They speak when words cannot be spoken. Depending upon their prompting, tears may be liquid love drops of sympathy, flowing sorrow, floods of jubilance. But not so here. They are dry tears out of parched souls. Empty tears out of empty hearts. They make imprints on the altar but no impression upon the Lord. They are unavailing.

- Tears without turning exhibit no tenderness.

- Tears without conviction only torment. They distill without dissipating the distress.

- Tears without contrition can never assuage anguish. There may be floods of grief without a vestige of relief.

Nor can this kind of tears ever merit heaven’s approbation though shed again and again: “He regardeth not the offering” (Malachi 2:13).

It is a profusion without profit.

It must also be remembered that tears speak of emotion, and emotion may be as empty as tears. Zeal without knowledge is also unacceptable. Those who veer from the paved highway of simple prescribed procedure may find themselves on crooked and rough bypaths, even in the wilderness of confusion. No, tears are not enough. If accompanied by repentance, they speak. If attended by compassion, they produce (Psalms 126:6). If prompted by the joy of the Lord, then they register in heaven.

7. DECEPTION

The Lord “hateth putting away; for one covereth violence with his garment” (Malachi 2:16). They had divorced themselves from true worship but used the cloak of outward observance to cover their insincerity.

Solomon spoke of seven things the Lord hates: “a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked migrations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness, and one who sows discord among the brethren” (Proverbs 6:17; Proverbs 6:19).

There are other things He hates as well, and none more intensely than the sinner attempting to conceal misdeeds. When quoting, “Blessed is he whose sin is covered” (Psalms 32:1), the late Pettingill always reminded, “Be careful who does the covering!”

There are such entries in the Record as these “The land is full of bloody crimes; the city is full of violence. They have filled the land with violence” (Ezekiel 7:23; Ezekiel 8:17).

The explanation for all of this is found in Zephaniah 3:4 : “Her prophets are light and treacherous [deceitful, unfaithful] persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary they have done violence to

the law."

But to attempt to conceal their wrongdoing was not only unmitigated blindness, but a deliberate denial of divine omniscience. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:24). "He shall not be able to hide himself" (Jeremiah 49:10). And man's deeds as well are open to infinite surveillance.

When we read that violence covereth them as a garment (Malachi 2:6), we are directed to the offender. "With his garment" is metaphorical. Garments are symbols of conduct, and the inference is, can the wrongdoing and unbelief of God's people be covered by church attendance, by offerings, even by affected tears? The Lord only observes three kinds of garments on the part of men:

- "fig leaves" (Genesis 3:7), unrighteousness;

- "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), self-righteousness; and

- "fine linen" (Revelation 19:8), Christ's righteousness.

"Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:6).

Here it is admitted that God's people live in a world that is saturated with deception (see 1 John 5:19). But the Lord can keep His own from evil. He has planned a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9) and, where sin abounds, grace superabounds (Romans 5:20). The ship must be in the water, but the water must not get into the ship. God's people must be in the world, but when the deception of the world infiltrates the sacred precincts of their souls, there is a blackout of perception, appreciation and appropriation of spiritual values.

8. DEGENERATION

"And did not he [God] make one [nation for Himself]? Yet had he the residue [more remaining power and ability] of the spirit [to do likewise for other people]. And wherefore [why] one [Israel]? [the answer:] That he might seek a godly seed" (Malachi 2:15).

I. After choosing these people, though fewest of all in number (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), [the Lord God referred to them as His peculiar people, those exclusively His, His Peculiar possession. He designed to have in them:

(1) A people for His glory according to Isaiah 43:7;

(2) A repository for His Word according to Romans 3:2; and

(3) A line and lineage for His Son (Matthew 1:1-16)].

It is to this third point our text refers-"That he might seek a godly seed."

It is not a matter of disappointment to Him who knows the end from the beginning to have a chosen people to apostatize, but it became a cause for great grief and deep displeasure. Of the 201 questions in the Book of Jeremiah, the following is one of the saddest: "I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right [certified] seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a

strange vine unto me?" (Jeremiah 2:21). Yet they bluntly asked, "Wherein need we return?"

ANTECEDENTS NO DETERRENT

Somehow we are given the impression that they were caught in the cross currents of confusion; that they were the victims of an impossible situation; that they had inherited the status quo (Malachi 3:7 a). Yet each generation had sufficient available knowledge to walk uprightly before God.

None can successfully charge his spiritual failures (or ignorance for that matter) to another, much less to the Lord.

Malachi's contemporaries not only had precept but examples as well.

The Holy Spirit has marched out on the horizon of divine revelation some startling and sobering cases of defeated and dejected personalities, who, by divine judgment and chastening, suffered a revocation of privilege, a removal of opportunity, or some grievous disillusionment.

Samson, for instance, pursued such a devious course that his spiritual power diminished to drab insignificance. His losses began to multiply. Then came the end ignominiously and with rapidity. At the knees of Delilah, in a drowsy stupor, his locks were shorn and his strength eclipsed. A troop of marauding Philistines, poised for such an advantageous moment, rushed with proud delight to the occasion, and in a matter of minutes gouged out the eyes of the dwarfed giant.

Then with dispatch and alacrity, the fetters were affixed, and the divinely chosen nobleman began grinding grist in the prison of his foes. Samson's loss of his Nazarite separation, his strength, his vision and the presence of the Spirit of God was followed by the loss of his life in the temple of Dagon where he was taken to "make sport" for his captors. This was Samson's sad end through departure from the Lord.

Saul is another case illustrating the cost of a careless course.

(1) Saul's testimony was untrue.

"I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:13), he assured Samuel. While he yet spoke, the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle put a lie to his statement (1 Samuel 15:4). They were to have been destroyed but the king had spared them. It is always ill-advised to move contrary to the revealed will of God.

(2) Saul's life was filled with pride (1 Samuel 15:17).

He developed a sense of independence and was operating as he desired.

(3) Saul was grossly disobedient (1 Samuel 15:9).

He felt that God would overlook his disobedience if he were to sacrifice some of the animals he failed to destroy.

(4) Saul's confession was too late (1 Samuel 15:24).

"I feared the people . . . I listened to their entreaties," he mumbled.

(5) Saul’s penalty was almost unbearable.

Being king of Israel was no small honor. Now he was to be impeached. It was a spectacular regime but it terminated ignominiously.

David also furnishes an example.

His career had sparkled with color and versatility. It abounded in excitement of adventure and intrigue, of daring and triumph. However, when he was about to realize his keenest desire, that of building the great temple, God disqualified him for previous conduct. Like the Arabs who folded their tents and silently stole away, a great and noble leader was making his exit from the limelight of human admiration and divine privilege.

It is hard to watch a champion go down, but this is just a further reminder that men ought not provoke the Lord nor grieve His Holy Spirit. Yet these precedents seemed to have no effect whatsoever upon the people recorded in the last book of the Old Testament.

Now comes this firm admonition in view of the approaching of Messiah’s advent, “Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth” (Malachi 2:15).

“The wife of his youth” refers to the original intent at the inception of the nation in the early days, that of producing a godly seed.

To “deal treacherously” is a warning concerning the bitter results of misjudgment and misconduct as when Abraham turned to Hagar from his lawful wife, Sarah (Genesis 16:4). Ishmael, the son of their union, became a malediction rather than a blessing.

Even so, Malachi warns that unholy alliances would produce an offspring of undesirable children.

With all of these despicable facts characterizing God’s people, they were surprised at the call to return. They refused it utterly, pressing on in their willfulness to the inevitable.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

04.05 The Lord God's Treasury Robbed

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LORD GOD'S TREASURY ROBBED

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me, But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Malachi 3:8).

FOUR DIVISIONS in this text are at once discoverable:

(1) Interrogation,

(2) indictment,

(3) contradiction,

(4) explanation.

It is not to be construed that this is the only way in which they robbed God. They had robbed Him of love, honor and obedience. Nor is it to be thought that tithes were more desired by the Lord than these. There is not the least hint of comparative value in this text. Neither is the chief concern of the Lord due to a lack of tithes and offerings, thus causing a deficient treasury. No, the point is deeper than this, more basic, more spiritual.

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

"The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Not necessarily the money itself, but the love of it; the love of what it can bring in the way of personal satisfaction. People love money for what they can get with it, for where they can go with it, for what they can do with it. The love of money underlies every professional contest, prompts every holdup or break-in, and figures in every bribery.

People, for the sake of money, will risk their reputations, endanger their lives and prostitute their morals. They will sacrifice principles to the point of lying and killing.

The love of money may influence a marriage, compromise a position and divert devotion from the Lord. A minimum of investigation would produce irrefutable proof that this was the basic cause of all the indignities toward the Lord God as recorded in Malachi.

Unlike Job, they questioned God's love because of personal material losses and the possibility of their enemy's gain.

- They disesteemed the Lord God's name because its holy character restricted the outreach of their desires.

- They corrupted His worship by offering the worthless and marketing the good.

- They refused His entreaty to return for, said they, we have more provisions and see less trouble when we worship the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:17).

- They robbed God by withholding for their own gain.

Invariably the love for money becomes stronger with its increasing supply. This type of love deafens the ear of God's people: "I spoke unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear" (Jeremiah 22:21). The love of money diverts the heart from God: "As they were increased [prospered], so they sinned against me" (Hosea 4:7), saith the Lord." This then is the indictment of the verse. THE THRALLDOM OF MONEY

The Case of Achan.

"When I saw among the spoils . . . two hundred shekels of silver, then I coveted them and took them" (Joshua 7:21). So reads the confession of Achan.

This was not a sin of ignorance. The gravity of the offense was well known to the offender. The penalty was death by stoning. But the propelling urge overpowered his judgment and plunged him into serious difficulty. He troubled Israel, angered the Lord God and forfeited his life.

In the lovely pasture land in the valley of Achor (Isaiah 65:10), a heap of stones (Joshua 7:26) marked the grave in which lay the body of a man who became frenzied with avarice for money; violated the law to get it; then, like most such people, never got to enjoy it.

The Case of Judas

"He cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5).

This was his last visit to the temple. However, he went not as a worshiper but as a betrayer of His Lord.

The contract was made, signed and sealed. It called for the party of the second part to identify the Saviour by a kiss and to receive from the party of the first part the sum of thirty pieces of silver for services rendered. The contract was dramatically fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disillusioned perpetrator of this evil deed surrendered the money without spending one piece, was filled with remorse and finally committed suicide.

The Case of Ananias and Sapphira

When the record states that they "kept back part of the price" (Acts 5:2), it reveals many underlying psychological, moral and spiritual factors. It suggests collusion, deception, falsification, fraudulency, pretense, misrepresentation-all because of the love of money. In this case, as in the two preceding ones, those who coveted money and stooped to immoral practices to possess it never benefited therefrom. These reports reflect the admonitory aspect of the Scriptures on the subject.

THE OBJECTION

More freely verse 8 would read: "Is it conceivable that finite man would rob the infinite God? Men say they do not, but in reality they do."

Here, of course, it is God's own people in view, but they disclaimed all guilt in this regard. The deceitfulness of the human heart has reached its worst display when man questions the veracity of God's Word or doubts the accuracy of His judgment. It is a matter of knowing to do good but doing it not. This of course is sin, but the heart has a way of consoling itself with the thought that God will overlook its selfishness, then feels no compunction in withholding from Him. Indeed, to be so charged, in this instance, meets with an innocent-appearing objection.

It was not necessarily a matter of pilfering from the treasury as it was not putting into it.

- They were not absconding, they were abstaining.

- They were not taking what was not theirs; they were withholding what was rightfully His.

It is a judicial decision which the unsurrendered mind hands down to govern one's selfish activities. The reasoning is thus: "The cattle on a thousand hills and all the gold and silver are the Lord's. He surely will not object if I keep for the satisfaction of crying needs what I otherwise would give to him."

A Christian couple, caught in a traffic violation in one of our cities and summoned before the court, prayed with much earnestness that the Lord would intervene in their behalf. The heavy fine which might have been imposed was suspended because it was their first offense. Greatly relieved, they left the courtroom and then compared notes.

"I promised the Lord," said the husband, "that if He would spare us the embarrassment of conviction, we would give to Him the full amount of the cost of such an offense."

"But," said the wife, "I told the Lord if He would intervene, we would give Him half the amount."

The wife's decision was honored. The flesh (the selfish self) always favors itself. And so man's devotion to God suffers.

Total commitment to the Lord is not a prominent thought in the minds of backsliders. It is not too conspicuous in the thinking of those who purport to be dedicated. This is what occasioned Paul's animated surprise in saying, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost . . . ye are not your own?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The attitudes and actions of present-day believers form a poor corollary to this truth. They "sell out" to Christ in a decision of faith and repentance but do not deliver themselves in a dedication through faith and obedience. Salvation is professed but service is not produced. Thus as it was in that day before our Lord's first advent, so is it in this day before His second coming.

THE COMMAND

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" (Malachi 3:10).

This one statement-a definite command-speaks of the giver, the gift, the procedure and the place. It becomes an obligation, a privilege, a blessing, an investment, a ministry and a necessity.

"Ye" refers to God's own people. He has no instruction for the unbelieving world, and no promise. To them he has but one word, a blessed word, a word of invitation: "Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 45:22).

His own, however; must be taught a deep sense of responsibility, an attitude of generosity, and the art of sharing.

What were they commanded to bring? Tithes.

This was obligatory. One-tenth of their income belonged to the Lord. The offerings were optional, albeit the Lord desired them. The tithe was a responsibility; the offerings, a privilege.

The former was said to be a measure of their honesty; the latter an evidence of their love.

And let it be remembered that the Lord specifically takes note of the gift which reflects the presence or lack of heart sincerity and devotion. The widow who gave her mite was divinely commended. The one who sows sparingly reaps sparingly.

Perhaps the chief reason why the Lord loves a cheerful giver is that it affords Him opportunity to give liberally in return.

The tithe made for proportionate giving-a fair and reasonable plan for all alike-while the offering permitted a personal test of appreciation with a latitude to accommodate any prompted liberality on the part of the offerer.

It provided an incentive to lay up treasures increasingly where rust and moth do not corrupt and where thieves cannot break through and steal.

THE STOREHOUSE

The storehouse could scarcely be termed a treasury.

- It was “in the field” (1 Chronicles 27:25).

- It was a storage for the fruit of the land which was given to the Lord.

- It was equally the distributing center.

Because of its purpose, it was sacred both to the Lord and to the people. With what pleasure must the sincere have brought their gifts to this place. And with what meticulous care it must have been attended there. So, whether in a storehouse for the fruit of the ground or a treasury for gold and silver, God tests the love of His people in giving as well as living.

THE CURSE

“Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Malachi 3:9).

If we are justified in believing that the mention of being robbed of tithes and offerings in Malachi 3:8 is an illustration in point and not the whole gamut of indignities (and we believe we are), then “robbed” in Malachi 3:9 has a larger application than in Malachi 3:8. This thought is supported by this statement: “They consider not in their hearts that I remember ALL [emphasis ours] their wickedness” (Hosea 7:2).

God’s plans for His people called for a benediction, not a malediction; a blessing, not a blight; kindness not a curse.

“The blessing of the Lord maketh rich and he addeth no sorrow with it.”

God is not the author of heartaches or the designer of difficulties or the architect of disaster. Tragedy is the chasm at the end of the road of unbelief and disobedience.

As for instance, “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways” (Haggai 1:6-7).

Questioning His love, profaning His name, corrupting His worship, refusing his entreaties and robbing Him were indignities that had to cease or chastisement must be imposed. Those “whom the Lord loveth he correcteth” (Proverbs 3:12). And the Lord loved these people (Jeremiah 31:3).

In dealing with His people, the Lord sought to make them prosperous. This accounts for such questions as “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isaiah 55:2).

The order of divine dealing with His own is

(1) instruction,

(2) reproof

(3) correction.

- When disobedience leads away from His will, reproof is registered.

- When reproof is disregarded (Proverbs 1:25), correction becomes necessary.

- Instruction is the highway to spiritual blessing and success.

- Reproof is the “red light” of divine warning.

Correction is designed to restore to the main route those who have gotten on a dangerous detour.

Reproof is preventative; correction remedial. Reproof is intended to keep one in the orbit of God’s will. Correction is an agent of recovery-the hand of love to turn wayward feet back into the path of obedience.

It is to be concluded and appreciated, therefore, that cursing is a last resort with the Lord, a requirement which persistent rebellion makes necessary, a discipline demanded. The whole nation was due to come under the rod (Malachi 3:9). THE CHALLENGE

“Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10).

Nothing is so apparent as the fact that there was an alternative to the curse. What was it? Blessing! Abundant blessing! Overwhelming blessing! It could come through proving the Lord. What does it mean to prove Him? Simply to obey Him; to take Him at His Word; to do what He commands.

God was not bribing them. That would be beneath the dignity of Deity. It is rather parental pleading with a desire to lavishly reward demonstrated love and willing obedience. It is never a risk to step where the overflowing water obscures the terra firma-that is, when God commands one to do so. This is why the Holy Spirit moved upon Mary to say, “Whatsoever he saith to you, do it” (John 2:5). Yes, one moves with safety and assurance in obeying His Word.

Then comes the promise, “I will open the windows of heaven.”

We know that God opens closed eyes, stopped ears, hardened hearts and mouth of the dumb. We know he opens graves, the gates of righteousness, the doors of privilege and the rivers of refreshing.

But what does it mean to open the windows of heaven?

First of all, there are windows in heaven (Genesis 7:11). It means that God moves in favor toward man. It bespeaks His pleasure. It announces His bestowment. During the wilderness journey, the Lord God “rained bread from heaven” (Exodus 16:4). The windows of heaven opened to deliver Noah, while the fountains of the great deep were broken up to engulf the wicked (Genesis 7:21). The windows of heaven opened when Jesus was baptized of John in the Jordan that the threefold manifestation of Deity might be witnessed in heaven as on earth (Luke 3:21-22). The windows of heaven opened to give courage to Stephen in his martyrdom by letting him see his Lord in this great hour of trial (Acts 7:55).

Heaven opened to show Peter the need of the Gentiles and to make known that salvation was also for Gentiles (Acts 10:11). But here in Malachi 3:10 is the only recorded instance where God gives to man the stated opportunity of causing the windows of heaven to open. The key was available, but the privilege was refused through indifference, unconcern and disobedience.

THE ABUNDANT BLESSING

What amount of blessing was it that would overtax their capacity to receive it? This is the lavishness of heaven’s favor.

- “I will love them freely” (Hosea 14:4).

- “Out of his belly [innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

- “Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over” (Luke 6:38).

God is never in one’s debt. He giveth and giveth and giveth again. And all His gifts are good and perfect and come from above (James 1:17).

ADDED REWARD

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground” (Malachi 3:11 a).

“Rebuke” means “to chide,” “to restrain.” God is here telling them He will give special protection to their producing acreage, preventing loss by thievery. He would repulse any who, with malicious intent, turned toward their fields. How wonderful that the Holy One of Israel would make these matters His concern when His desire becomes the devoted interest of His people!

The Lord God laid down a simple principle of profound import in stating, “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Proverbs 16:7). Or, as was stated to Jehoshaphat, “The battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chronicles 20:15). The One high and lifted up makes Himself the Representative of man to care for his every need when, in turn, man makes Him the singular heart interest of his life.

Nor was this all of the promised blessing for those who, through obedience in bringing all the tithes into the storehouse, would prove the Lord. “Neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:11 c).

Many things can happen to fruit-a blight can prevent budding; a frost or a freeze can destroy blossoms; hail can scar; severe wind and violent rain can cast it down before ripening or when ripe to injury; disease can disfigure; insects and worms can ravage. But none of these, or any other agent, can touch a single piece if God hedges them in with His protection. This He promised to do if they would bring their tithe and offerings.

TESTIMONY TO OTHERS

“And all nations shall call you blessed; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:12). Here is still another added blessing for obedience-the blessing of testifying to others of the goodness of the Lord. We are so many times reminded that no man liveth unto himself or dieth unto himself. “Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). And what we do affects the Lord favorably or unfavorably.

However, because they did not lay matters of godly import to heart, the Lord God was forced to say, “I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already” (Malachi 2:2). “Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof . . . and I will destroy her vines and her fig trees” (Hosea 2:9; Hosea 2:12).

Instead of the nations witnessing a “delightsome land”, they viewed a desolate land.

In the meanwhile, the Lord God is restless about this condition (Isaiah 62:1). While there is currently a degree of restoration in national Israel, it is not what it will be until the Jewish people get right with God. Then will they be called “Hephzibah” (in whom I delight), and the nations will acclaim them “The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord” (Isaiah 62:4; Isaiah 62:12).

But for these approximately 2,500 years of dispersion they have been deprived of the blessings of the Lord and of being a blessing to the nations, all because they robbed God.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

04.06 The Lord God's Sovereignty Denied

CHAPTER SIX

THE LORD GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY DENIED

"Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord" (Malachi 3:13).

AN ATTITUDE OF THIS NATURE

Toward the Almighty is more than careless indifference or casual irreverence. It is premeditated blasphemy. It is tantamount to a denial of His lordship and authority, and such denial, either in word or in action, is the ultimate of unbelief.

THE ANTAGONISM

God calls the attention of His people to the kind of language they had been employing, especially as concerning Him, His commands and His worship. Their words had been "stout." This is not mere impoliteness or discourtesy. It reflects an obstinacy and relentlessness, an impenitence and obduracy. They had "refused to receive correction; they had made their faces harder than a rock; they had refused to return" (Jeremiah 5:3).

This is the unsightly portrait of a spiritual recalcitrant-an incorrigible-one "bent to backsliding" (Hosea 11:7).

As pathetic as is the catastrophe which has blackened the history of these people, the cause is attributable, not to their avowed enemies, but to themselves. Here is the authority for this statement:

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hosea 13:9).

One fact is certain, they will never be able to successfully charge the Lord God with the seemingly interminable hardships which have been their lot these many centuries.

The Record is replete with tender divine entreaties designed for their good.

Following are some examples:

"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever" (Deuteronomy 5:29).

"Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns . . . set up the standard toward Zion . . . O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness . . . " (Jeremiah 4:3; Jeremiah 4:6; Jeremiah 4:14).

Despite this outflow of incomparable love, their words were "stout" against Him, often clothed in the character of an ultimatum-"But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own

mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 44:17).

Their posterity has lived to rue the day their forefathers bit on these sour grapes to put their teeth on edge (Jeremiah 31:29). And the end of their hardship is not yet. The darkest hour is yet to come, an hour of persecution and misery, for it shall be "As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:19-20).

A VOCAL ASSAULT

"Ye have wearied the Lord with your words" (Malachi 2:17).

They were words of selfishness, of sacrilege, of rebellion, of utter defiance. How contrary to David's counsel: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels . . . Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure" (Psalms 103:20-21).

How different from David's personal longing: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalms 19:14).

Words may be filthy, foolish or idle (Ephesians 5:4). They need not be directed to the Lord or spoken about Him to be displeasing to Him. Everything that is unspiritual is an offense to the Spirit who indwells the believer. This occasions the necessary exhortation: "Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10).

Those sufficiently interested in words acceptable to the Lord will find a catalog of helpful suggestions in Php 4:8 : "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report . . . think on these things." If these things characterize our thoughts, then our words will be most pleasing to Him, and our conduct as well. With apostate Israel, there was little that could be termed honest, just, pure, lovely or of good report, either in their words or in their actions.

And what, exactly, was the Lord God's reaction when we are told He was wearied with their words? The word "wearied" means, literally, "to gasp." Thus it results that the very people whom He brought to himself for His glory (Isaiah 43:7), instead of bringing Him glory are causing Him "to gasp."

This had been a complaint of long standing. "Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities [when] I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake" (Isaiah 43:24-25). They wearied Him with empty ceremonies and vain words: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts" (Amos 5:21-22).

God wants people to speak. This is proved in His question to Adam and Eve: "Where art thou?" And to Cain, "What is this that thou hast done?" "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God . . . take with you words" (Hosea 14:1-2).

And when the right words are communicated-words of truth and sincerity, words of faith and repentance-heaven will hear and respond. This is precisely what God desired; this is what His people so sorely needed.

THE SPECIFIC CHARGE

When the people bluntly asked, “Wherein have we wearied him?” the answer was, “When ye say, everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them” (Malachi 2:17).

Does the point here seem obscured? It is a betrayed self-justification. It is the agelong question which usually incubates in the hearts of discouraged or afflicted believers: “Why do the wicked prosper? Why do they go unpunished?” It is a self-pity which gives rise to baseless, indicting charges against the justice of God.

It is a sad state of affairs when such thoughts invade the mind and escape the lips. That the wicked prosper can never be a determining factor in judging the justice of God. The “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17) awaits the faithful believer who, like Lazarus, may have experienced hardship and destitution here, while the prosperous in this world, like the rich man (Luke 16:1-31), may not so much as have a mere drop of water to soothe or to comfort in a lost world. God will make all things right.

He doeth all things decently and in order. The righteous will be properly rewarded and the wicked will be fairly punished.

Just because fire does not fall from Heaven to consume the unrighteous at the hysterical cry of disciples furnishes no basis whatsoever for the conclusion that God views evil as good. That which is evil can never be good. It is condemned forthwith.

THE MORE SERIOUS OFFENSE

“Where is the God of judgment?” they complained (Malachi 2:17).

The implications here are many.

It was one thing for the enemy to taunt a righteous man with the jibe, “Where is thy God?” (Psalms 42:3). It is quite another for the Lord God’s own covenant people to ask, “Where is the God of judgment?”

It was charging:

- The unfailing One with insubordination,

- The merciful One with unconcern,

- The changeless One with failure,

- The victorious Lord with defeat.

Reduced to simple language, they were saying in their panic, “Why doesn’t God do something?”

But God was doing something! He was promising what men had never heard nor seen in the way of blessing IF they would “wait for,” “long for,” “adhere to” Him (Isaiah 64:4). He was offering to

meet him who “rejoiceth and worketh righteousness” (Isaiah 64:5).

And more-God was standing nearby, saying, “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts” (Isaiah 65:2).

Once again they are proved false and foolish who, being out of fellowship with God, attempt to charge Him with their failures. This never brings an iota of peace to a troubled heart. Such peace only comes through a simple, honest, willing concurrence with the divine will.

FLAGRANT CONTEMPT

When the Lord God indicated that their words caused Him “to gasp” (be wearied), they asked, “What have we spoken so much against thee?”

The Lord answered them, saying, “Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?” (Malachi 3:14)

Here is a revealing diagnosis of their attitude:

- The Word: too exacting-No Desire

- The Walk: too narrow-No Delight

- The Work: too difficult-No Dedication.

In this state of serious spiritual debility, they engage themselves in another tirade of flagrant aspersions. Through imperfect perception and unwise comparison:

- They called the “proud” (arrogant, haughty, insolent) happy (Malachi 3:15).

- They apparently were unaware of the fact that, apart from the superficial happiness of those cited, this was a description of themselves.

- They had emulated the heathen.

- They had imitated the wicked, but they had no happiness. “Their drink is sour” (Hosea 4:18).

- They “walked mournfully” (Malachi 3:14).

Instead of the emptiness of their own lives condemning them, they were constantly accusing or excusing.

It seems inconceivable that the people of God could charge their glorious Sovereign with exalting the wicked or with favoring those who tempt Him. These people had earlier declared they had plentiful provisions and saw no ill when they did what the heathen did (Jeremiah 44:17). This can only be the outburst of deceived hearts.

Now they add to their sin and judgment the ridiculous complaint that it is vain to serve God. But what saith the Record? He that gives cold water in the name of the Lord “shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42). Again, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in

the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

- John Mark may contend that God's way is too exacting and give up.

- Demas may become enamored of the glittering world and succumb to it.

But men like Moses make the wise choice, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25).

The motivating factor in this choice was due to a clear vision:

"He had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Hebrews 11:26).

BRIGHT SPOT ON THE HORIZON

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16).

Here are the proverbial seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. It is a remnant of faithful ones who have kept themselves unspotted from the world of unbelief and wickedness.

They did two commendable things.

(1) They feared God.

(2) They fellowshipped with one another about the Name above all names.

- "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him" (Psalms 25:14).

- Those who fear God lack no good thing (Psalms 34:9).

- "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence" (Proverbs 14:26).

- The fear of the Lord is also "a fountain of life" (Proverbs 14:27).

It is clear that the Lord is pleased when His people fellowship in His name (Matthew 18:20). He evidences His pleasure:

(1) by listening in;

(2) by making a record for their future remembrance.

One day, while visiting the old homestead, the author's aged mother, summoning him to an upstairs bedroom, produced from an old trunk several rolls of age-worn papers. Removing the ribbon by which they had been held together, the papers were placed in my hand. They proved to be class papers from early school days, papers which contained perfect grades.

With some surprise I asked the purpose of preserving these products of childhood, long since forgotten.

Mother replied: "When, as a lad, you rushed home from school excitedly to share the news of a perfect paper, it brought great joy to your mother. Knowing these occasions would be forgotten by you in passing years, I have kept these papers for this moment to remind you, as an adult and

parent, of former days when you brought pleasure to an appreciative mother's heart."

In some such manner, there awaits the God-fearing and Name-fellowshipping saints a divine reminder that, when others were forgetting and departing, their devotion was noticed and appreciated from on high.

In every age, it is the anointed few who keep:

- the light of testimony glowing,

- the witness of truth moving,

- the spiritual heritage of posterity alive.

Schools of thought may multiply, schisms may work havoc in the professing church, fears may flourish and strife abound, but the stable minority:

- Keeps close to the Lord,

- Fellowships in His name,

- Enjoys the simplicity in Christ,

- Witnesses a good confession,

- Waits patiently for God's Son from heaven.

Those who would join them, these God-fearing saints, must give themselves to a work of faith, a labor of love and the patience of hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

In Abraham's day, not ten righteous could be found in Sodom. The Lord would have spared the city had even so small a number been discoverable who loved Him.

In Jeremiah's day, the prophet was commanded to run to and fro even in the street to see if he could find a discerning spiritual man who knew the way of the Lord (Jeremiah 5:1).

Such may be the scarcity of true believers in any age. It should constitute a challenge for every sincere person of our day to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, . . . [to] run with patience the race that is set before us . . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

04.07 The Three Tenses Of The Lord's Sovereignty

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE THREE TENSES OF THE LORD’S SOVEREIGNTY

“I am the Lord” (Malachi 3:6) AS THE GOSPEL OF JOHN scintillates with the identifying “I am” of Jesus, even so the Book of Malachi is radiant with the “I am”; of the Lord God. These revealing identifications fall into three tenses.*

* As shown in the Authorized Version. The Hebrew perfect and imperfect tenses may appear in the English as the past, present or future.

It would be well to observe their occurrence before proceeding to an explanation.

PAST TENSE:

- “I have loved you” (Malachi 1:2).

- “I have sent my commandment” (Malachi 2:4).

- “I gave them to him [life and peace]” (Malachi 2:5).

PRESENT TENSE:

“I am a great king” (Malachi 1:14).

“I am the Lord” (Malachi 3:6).

“I change not” (Malachi 3:6).

FUTURE TENSE:

“I will send my messenger” (Malachi 3:1).

“I will come near” (Malachi 3:5).

“I will be a swift witness” (Malachi 3:5).

“I will return” (Malachi 3:7).

“I will rebuke” (Malachi 3:11).

“I will spare” (Malachi 3:17). The student of the Scriptures will be quick to perceive the biblical involvement and the vast coverage of Truth these quotations suggest. How great is the God of Jacob and of Elijah! Yet, in the blindness of unbelief, the people’s words were stout against Him, making necessary these marvelous affirmations. THE PAST TENSE

“I have loved you.”

Evidence to substantiate this statement abounds.

First, there is the witness of Truth itself.

It was God speaking and His “Word is true from the beginning” (Psalms 119:160).

- Jesus affirmed that His “word is truth” (John 17:17).

- Paul argued, “Let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4).

Second, there is the witness of history.

God loved them at the inception of or in the choosing of the nation (Deuteronomy 7:8).

- He loved them during their national infancy (Hosea 11:1).

- He loved them all the while they were whoring after other gods (Jeremiah 31:3).

Third, there is the witness of experience.

Leadership perception was never clearer than when Jeremiah exclaimed, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not all consumed, because his compassions fail not” (Lamentations 3:22). “His banner over me was love” (Song of Solomon 2:4).

This was true in Egypt, during their wilderness journey, at the Red Sea, crossing the Jordan, and when enemies attacked. “God is love” (1 John 4:8); therefore, “love is of God” (1 John 4:7), and His lovingkindnesses were but the outflow of His very nature. Yet, for all of this, they questioned His love.

“I have sent my commandment.”

The word “commandment” is most comprehensive. It refers to the Lord God’s established instructions, His unalterable directives.

It became crystallized in Solomon’s summation of human responsibility toward Deity: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

The matter is reduced to an irreducible minimum in Jeremiah 7:23 :

“This [one] thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God.”

His voice is the voice of revealed Truth. It was to be obeyed, but the record reveals that it was not obeyed: “Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof” (Proverbs 1:25). Turning from God’s perfect law (Psalms 19:7) is the great “transgression” (Daniel 9:24), the one from which David prayed to be spared (Psalms 19:13).

God sent His Word through His Spirit.

He is the Author of divine revelation. He employed human instrumentality, but the Bible is His production. Holy men of old were borne along by His power and direction (2 Peter 1:21).

- He wove the element of life into its lines as the wool is woven into the fabric (1 Peter 1:23).

- He infused into its texture the manna of Heaven to nourish the life it produces (Job 23:12; 2 Peter 1:3).

- He electrified its content with hallowed illumination capable of dissipating the densest darkness along our wilderness pathway (Psalms 119:105).

- He incorporated a power within its message to bulwark the believer against the militating forces of evil.

- He built into its structure a potent provision capable of dismantling the strongholds of Satan.

In Psalms 119:1-176 is to be found the most profuse eulogy to the Scriptures extant.

The Psalmist spoke:

- Of its trustworthiness (Psalms 119:86),

- Of its eternality (Psalms 119:89),

- Of its appeal (Psalms 119:97),

- Of its sweetness (Psalms 119:103),

- Of its illumination (Psalms 119:105),

- Of its wonders (Psalms 119:120),

- Of its veracity (Psalms 119:142).

Its development covered more than 1,400 years, employing more than 40 human penmen, mostly unknown to each other and living at different times in various places and under differing circumstances, yet its unity is an amazing proof of its divine authenticity. Its unity can successfully stand the test from the structural, historic, ethic, prophetic, organic, mathematic and personal points of view.

This was the authority rejected and the message refused.

“I gave them life and peace.”

As love is of God, even so is life. Moses in his closing counsels to the people was dynamic in his appeal for them to,

“Love the Lord thy God, that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for HE IS THY LIFE, and the length of thy days” (Deuteronomy 30:20).

And the life which God gives is always attended by the benediction of His peace. God clearly stated that He had only thoughts of peace for them (Jeremiah 29:11). Had they gone down the pathway of obedience, the Lord would have met them there with the abounding joys of life and with the sweetness of His peace. Instead, their feet trod the course of disobedience into suffering and sorrow. What might have been a romance of victory became a cavalcade of disaster.

The life which God gives is His own life, even His own nature (2 Peter 1:4).

It is not mere existence with harassing trials to mar and scar but a walk and a welfare with God in the center, producing a joy and blessing unobtainable and undiscoverable from any other source. Jesus reduced the matter to simple terms for this age: “This is life eternal, that they might know

thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Neither in Old Testament days nor in the New have men evidenced much desire for the life that is of God.

Life and peace are inseparable.

Life unites us to God, and peace is perfect union with Him. Peace is:

(1) exclusive in its origin.

It is "not as the world giveth" (John 14:27).

- Look where you will and you look in vain for peace apart from the Prince of peace.

- Search as you will for peace and your efforts will mock you unless you reach Him by faith.

- Fight for peace and your wounds will be worthless, your dying folly.

Real peace comes from but one source.

(2) Peace is exceptional in its character.

The peace which God gives is not what the world speaks about, fights and dies for-an uncertain, unstable, unsatisfying something at which to grasp but never to be sure the grip is firm and lasting. No, it is something real, something restful, something refreshing.

(3) Peace is excellent in its exhilarating effect.

- It is the refreshing atmosphere of heaven inhaled by an exercise of faith.

- It is the assurance of sins forgiven,

- It is the confidence of a present salvation

- It is the certainty of future glory.

God, who is rich in mercy according to the love wherewith He has loved us, provided through the Saviour a living, lasting peace for all who will surrender their wills to Him. Nor is this only New Testament teaching. Isaiah assured, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3). THE PRESENT TENSE

"I am a great king."

Again, we have the voice of veracity. God declares His sovereignty. How pathetically Israel had overlooked this transcendent fact.

When they demanded a king like the nations, they were not cognizant of the fact that God had never intended for them to have a king like the heathen. The adjective "great" contains more than a superlative connotation; it suggests inimitability.

- Moses, pursuant to the Red Sea miracle, exalted the Lord with such references as "glorious in power" and "the greatness of thine excellency" (Exodus 15:6-7).

- David sang of "The Lord's throne in heaven" (Psalms 11:4).

Now, through prolonged disobedience, the verdure is stripped from their former confessions of reverence and devotion, leaving the dried leaves of lifeless unbelief. Thus the Lord God must remind them that He is a great King and that He should be honored and obeyed.

The Lord Jesus is prophetically pictured in three ways:

(1) As the “King,”

(2) as the “Prince of peace,”

(3) as the “Chief Shepherd.”

Each designation characterizes a particular ministry.

- As the King of kings, He will rule.

- As the Prince of peace, He will bring order to a restless, frustrated world.

- As the Chief Shepherd, He will feed and care for His sheep.

But in each instance, we must note well, it is an earthly scene. Heaven does not need a king to rule, a prince to bring peace, or a shepherd to feed.

- There the residents never hunger or thirst.

- There the atmosphere is one of sublime peacefulness.

- There the need for ruling is nonexistent.

That Jesus is king of the Jews is well established.

- There is the testimony of the angel Gabriel at the annunciation (Luke 1:30-32),

- The word of the wise men at His birth (Matthew 2:2),

- The word of the Roman government inscribed on the cross at His death (Matthew 27:37),

- The word of Peter concerning His resurrection (Acts 2:30),

- The word of Christ Himself (John 19:21). “The Lord is King for ever and ever” (Psalms 10:16).

Yet His own chosen people disesteemed His name and disowned Him (John 1:11).

“I am the Lord.”

What a pitiful situation when the infinite God finds it necessary to remind people, especially His own, that He is the Lord!

In Leviticus, it is stated 21 times, “I am the Lord”, and 21 times, “I am the Lord thy God.”

Now the lordship of the Most High was lost sight of in their pursuit of personal pleasure and earthly satisfaction. The enemy of the human soul has reached the paragon of success when he has erased from the consciousness of man all sense of the holiness and transcendent greatness of Deity.

Non-recognition of His Deity was reflected in:

- Their lack of proper worship,

- Their refusal of His entreaties,

- Their rejection of His Word,

- Their disregard for His name.

This is the travesty of unbelief. God's people must know He is a great king to be honored and obeyed; that He is equally the Lord to be worshiped and adored.

Until His lordship is acknowledged, there can be no hope for these people or for any people.

It is the acknowledging of His lordship which brings one under His control and promotion. Saul of Tarsus, in his experience along the road to Damascus, is a striking illustration: "Lord," he said humbly and sincerely, "what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). This was the turning point which eventuated in perhaps the most exemplary spiritual conduct and service the world has ever witnessed. And He is still Lord of lords.

"I change not."

Here is stated immutability, and the inference is a strong indictment against the people.

- He is still the "I AM" who accompanied Moses (Exodus 3:14).

- He is still the glorious One who filled the tabernacle with His glory (Exodus 40:34).

- He is still the thrice holy One high and lifted up (Isaiah 6:1-13).

- He is still the One who doeth wonders (Jeremiah 32:17).

No, He has not changed. It was the people who had changed.

They had changed:

- To unbelief,

- To indifference,

- To unconcern,

- To self-reliance,

- To unspirituality,

- To godlessness.

With the changeless God on one side and the constantly changing people on the other, a divergence developed which wrought the downfall and misery of these ancient people.

God has not and cannot change in His character or in His attributes.

- Through an Old Testament priest, He said, "Be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45).

- Through a New Testament apostle, He utters the same words (1 Peter 1:16).

He does not change as to His plan and purpose: “The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27).

- He cannot change as to His Word, for it is forever established in heaven (Psalms 119:89).

- He cannot change as to His love because it is His very nature (1 John 4:8).

- He will not change as to His promises because He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

From whatever angle we view the Most High, we are led sooner or later to assert, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever!” (Hebrews 13:8). THE FUTURE TENSE

We observed a trinity of divine identifications on the part of the Lord God in the past tense, and a trinity in the present tense. We now meet a duo-trinity in the future tense, three concerning the immediate future and three the remote. They sketch for us a prophetic picture of profound proportions.

“I will send my messenger.”

Prophetic language may seem confusing at times since the Lord, not limited by time, may employ the present tense for a matter yet in the future; but when He uses the future tense it never refers to the present or to the past. It is the future. Thus the “messenger” promised in Malachi 3:1 postdates Malachi (“my messenger”).

The fact is there are two messengers seen in this verse.

The first is John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Christ (Matthew 11:10). The second is Christ Himself, but in His second advent, for two pointed questions are immediately asked, “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?” (Malachi 3:2).

It is very clear that Malachi, the messenger, cannot set things right. It will require God’s incomparable Messenger. And concerning Him, it is prophesied, “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high” (Isaiah 52:13). And when He ultimately arrives in power and great glory, He shall be called “Faithful and True”, “The Word of God”, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:1-21).

In a parabolic explanation of human reactions to divine agents, our Lord related how a proprietor leased his vineyard to tillers (Matthew 21:33). When the vintage time approached, the owner sought his share. The lessees took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned the third. Others were sent and received like treatment. Finally he sent his son, believing they would honor him; but when the workers saw the son, they said, “Come, let us kill him and get hold of his inheritance.”

How pictorially true this was of the prophets who were stoned and beaten and sawn asunder, and of the Father’s own Son (Proverbs 30:4), Who was conspired against and caused to be crucified.

This was God’s true Messenger for Whom the Jews still wait and Whom the New Testament Church joyfully anticipates, the Church to be raptured to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17); Israel to be returned to the land (Ezekiel 37:21).

Hated, despised, rejected was He Whose word commanded the wind and the sea;

By Whose compassion the hungry were fed, Who healed the living, whose voice raised the dead.

“I will come near.”

This is doubtless the incarnation, for the Lord identified Himself with His people in the flesh, being “made of a woman, made under the Law” (Galatians 4:4).

But as Israel failed to recognize His transcendence in Malachi’s day, neither did they recognize His condescension in John’s day. The last prophet of the legal regime lamented, “There standeth one among you, whom ye know not” (John 1:26). How terribly condemning that it should be divinely stated, “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11).

Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, came near, even into their midst, to offer them life and peace and joy, but He was neither recognized nor received.

This raises the question, How near must the Lord come to one to be recognized?

The law and the prophets were filled with the announcements of His coming near:

- His supernatural birth (Isaiah 7:14),

- His advent declaration (Isaiah 9:6),

- The place of His nativity (Micah 5:2),

- His humility (Isaiah 53:2),

- His counseling (Isaiah 9:6)

- His presentation to them as King (Zechariah 9:9).

- He came near enough for their reach of faith (Matthew 1:21).

- He came near with words such as man had never uttered (John 7:46),

- He came near with miracles that man had never seen (Mark 4:41),

- He came near with an authority that amazed His hearers (Matthew 7:29).

His predicted ministry was fully accomplished (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:17-19), and thirty-three distinct prophecies were minutely fulfilled the day of His death.

He came near enough to be received but was rejected.

“I will be a swift witness.”

Here is an allusion to the Omniscience of the Lord. From the beginning it was made clear that all are in full view of “the living One.”

- He sees His people in their problems and perplexities (“La-hai-roi”, Genesis 16:13).

- He sees them in their pursuit of happiness (“La-hai-roi”, Genesis 24:62).

- He sees them in the practical procedures of life (“La-hai-roi”, Genesis 25:11).

Nothing can be done in secret that shall not be known to Him. This truth is prodigiously developed in Psalms 139:1-24.

The word “witness” here in Malachi 3:5 combines in meaning with the same word in Malachi 2:14 to show that God quickly, readily, promptly takes note of all actions and words.

- He witnessed the antagonism toward Christ on the part of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians.

- He observed their attempts to ensnare Him during His earthly ministry.

- He noted the conspiracies of the chief priests and elders to make riddance of Jesus and to silence His message.

- He noted the schemes of the Sanhedrin to indict Christ and to demand of the Roman court His crucifixion.

The immediate context gives an impressive list of those who come under divine scrutiny-sorcerers, adulterers, swearers, oppressors, extortioners, and those who fear not the Lord (3:5).

Surely “the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

“I will return.”

We move now to the more remote future in the plans of the Almighty. It is true there is an immediate promise involved here contingent upon the return of His people unto Him. However, the fact that the people in Malachi’s day refused to return, did not humble themselves and repent, projects the thought of the text into the yet future.

The return prophesied herein does not pertain unto the appearing (parousia), the unveiling (apocalupsis), or the manifestation (epiphanea), namely, the second coming of Christ. It has to do with His coming back into dealing relationship with them. This relationship was broken (interrupted) when Messiah was “cut off.” It will be resumed in the 70th week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24).

This will be the tribulation and great tribulation period-a time of severe and unprecedented judgment.

If the Lord is not to resume His dealings with His covenant people, the Bible would leave much to be explained.

- What about His “everlasting covenant”?

- What about His promises concerning the land?

- What about His plans to give them a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11)?

How else could His resumption of dealings fit the case apart from chastisement when, in taking His leave of them, they were in a state of unprecedented apostasy, questioning His love, profaning His name, corrupting His worship, refusing His entreaties, with their words “stout” against Him? He will resume His dealings with His ancient people to honor His Word, to keep inviolate His integrity and to fulfill His promises through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

“I will rebuke.”

The position of this promise in the context, together with the suggestion respectively of the prophecies, “I will return” and “I will spare”, would surely justify our belief that this “rebuke” concerns the day of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7), or the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21).

The devil hates the Jews for they constituted the line and lineage for God’s Son (Matthew 1:1-25; Luke 3:1-38), and the repository for His Word (Romans 3:2). The evil one, knowing his days are few, will try to destroy the woman (Israel, Revelation 12:3-4) who gave birth to the “man child” (Christ, Revelation 12:5). But God will restrain him.

If he manifests his fury through Gog of the land of Magog (presumably Russia); the Lord will rain fire upon him (Ezekiel 38:1; Ezekiel 38:22). However Satan may attack the people of God, divine power will discomfit him.

The Lord will ultimately magnify Himself with His people (Ezekiel 38:23; Malachi 1:5).

“I will spare.”

The Bible concerns itself with three classes of people, namely, the Jew, the Gentile, the Church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). The message of Malachi has to do with the Jew. The Church is not in view in it. When God speaks of sparing some, we naturally want to know who, how, when and under what conditions. The Scriptures fully satisfy our inquiries.

The Lord, witnessing the transgressions of His people (Malachi 3:5), returns to His dealings with them in tribulation judgment (Malachi 3:7), and rebuking the fearful adversary (Malachi 3:11), promises that some will be spared. They are characterized as “jewels” in a dark day (Malachi 3:17) and as those who “feared the Lord” (Malachi 3:16).

Who are they? They are the 144,000, twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel (Revelation 7:14). These shall be spared to enter the restored kingdom.

There is a sense in which the preservation of these people has been nothing short of a miracle. It is not at all hyperbolical to use the expression, “the indestructible Jew.”

Mrs. Helen Mael is quite correct in her observation:

- The king of Egypt could not diminish him (Exodus 1:9-12).

- The waters of the Red Sea could not drown him (Exodus 14:1-31).

- The gallows of Haman could not hang him (Esther 5:14; Esther 7:10).

- The great fish could not digest him (Jonah 1:17; Jonah 2:10).

- The fiery furnace could not destroy him (Daniel 3:16-28).

- Balaam could not curse him (Numbers 23:7-8).

- The lions of Babylon could not devour him (Daniel 6:3-28).

- The nations of the world cannot assimilate him (Deuteronomy 33:29).

- The dictators of the world cannot annihilate him (Isaiah 14:1-3).

However, the most miraculous “sparing” is yet to take place. With the “man of sin” bent upon the utter extermination of the Jew, the Lord will intervene.

In a previous dark day, it was said, “If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou (Haman) hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him” (Esther 6:13).

This will be even more true in the day of “Jacob’s trouble.”

~ end of chapter 7 ~

04.08 Messiah's Coming Ignored

CHAPTER EIGHT

MESSIAH'S COMING IGNORED

"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple" (Malachi 3:1). THE DARKNESS OF UNBELIEF has a disastrous effect upon spiritual vision, and it had wrought serious havoc with these people. It was more than a contraction of the cornea; it was a case of obscuring cataracts-a blindness which remains to this day over the eyes of Jewish people.

As the coming of the Lord is the ultimate in expectation for the saints today, even so the advent of Messiah was the paragon of hope for the Old Testament Hebrews. But, as the day drew near, the darkness deepened in their hearts. Hope that ceases to inspire is no longer hope. Expectation that fails to encourage is no longer dynamic. An outlook without inducement is no longer vision.

No one would suspect that a people so profoundly guilty of apostasy could show any joyful interest in the fulfillment of divine prophecy. Their sun going down while it was yet day (Jeremiah 15:9) was an eclipse of national glory. Their apostasy of Malachi's day was a blackout of spiritual hope.

Four hundred years of darkness ensued as the lamp of prophecy did not shine until a stellar spotlight from heaven focused on a humble stable where lay a Babe Who was Immanuel-Saviour. The record speaks for itself: "He came unto His own, and His own (the Jews) received him not" (John 1:11).

As the callings of God are without repentance (Romans 11:29), so are His promises.

Whether man is faithful or unfaithful, true or untrue, God remains faithful, for He cannot contradict Himself (2 Timothy 2:13). We may be assured, therefore, that the timetable of the Almighty will develop on schedule. God will do what He has promised. If man willfully chooses to ignore and reject it, he must suffer the consequences.

This is Israel, not only of the past, but of the present and of the (at least immediate) future.

The day will come, of course, when, as with Paul having his eyes opened (Acts 9:1-43), they shall see Him whom they have pierced (Revelation 1:7). A nation will be born at once (Isaiah 66:8). Messiah shall "extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream" (Isaiah 66:12).

THE FORERUNNER

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me" (Malachi 3:1).

That this is John the Baptizer is supported by the words of Jesus, who, when referring to John, said, "This is he, of whom it is written" (Matthew 11:10). And His reference, of course, is to Malachi 3:1.

John was “sent from God . . . to bear witness of the Light [Jesus] that all men through him might believe” (John 1:6-7). In his faithful witness, he declared, “He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me” (John 1:15). Expounding the truth, he emphasized that out of Christ’s fullness have all received grace upon grace. Also, that “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Then, in a most striking introduction with a pointing index finger, he announced, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The Book of Malachi is irrefutable proof that the covenant people were ill-prepared for Messiah’s coming.

It is evident that the dark inter-testament period did not change this condition. When the curtain rose on the New Testament era, it revealed a people who had no room for Messiah, imprisoned and beheaded His forerunner, hated intensely His message, conspired frequently to destroy Him and finally had Him impaled on a Roman cross between two dying thieves.

John identified himself by calling attention to Isaiah’s prophecy (Matthew 3:3), then assumed his God-given responsibility of preparing the way for Messiah (Matthew 3:3). His uniform was made of camel’s hair, gathered about him with a leather belt, and he subsisted on a simple diet of locusts and wild honey.

This envoy of the King, during his brief ministry, baptized repentant residents of Jerusalem and other parts of Judea. He castigated the Pharisees and Sadducees for their pride, pretense and traditional bias. Then, in graphic statements, he bore testimony to the work of Christ as Saviour and Judge (Matthew 3:11-12).

THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT

“The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant” (Malachi 3:1).

No segment of humanity should have understood this announcement better or appreciated it more than Malachi’s people, although it fell on deaf ears in that day.

The announcement is both clear and concise. Someone was coming. It was someone whom they were seeking. It was the messenger of the covenant, even the Lord Himself.

“Whom ye seek” may seem inconsistent with the attitude of the people of that day. Can one be bent upon backsliding from the Lord (Hosea 11:7) and seeking for Him at the same time? Not likely. It must be conceded, however, that ever since the promise was given, there is a sense in which the people sought for His coming, or at least kept the thought of the glorious event in mind. There is a sense in which Messiah is expected by the Jews today.

Following are two excerpts from the Jewish prayer book:

(1) “Blow the great triumph of our delivery, and raise the banner of the ingathering of our exiles and assemble us together from the four corners of the earth.”

(2) “And return in mercy to thy city of Jerusalem and dwell in her midst as thou hast spoken, and restore her with a perpetual restoration speedily in our day.”

More specifically, of course, it must be assumed that Malachi 3:1 has reference to a future time, a time that finds them delighting in the Lord- “whom ye delight in.” Then there will be a seeking.

More than that, there will be a finding (Jeremiah 29:13). Then covenant relationship will be resumed. They shall no more be termed “Lo-ammi” (not my people) as in Hosea 1:9. Neither will they then be termed “Forsaken” anymore (Isaiah 62:4).

DARKNESS BEFORE THE DAWN

“He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap” (Malachi 3:2).

This language is not consonant with joy and peace and blessing. Neither is it synonymous with millennial praise in the receiving and greeting of the Kings of kings and Lord of lords. No, there is a period of dense darkness before the day dawns, and our text alludes to it.

The questions, “Who may abide?” and “Who shall stand?” speak of the intensity and fearfulness of that day. We need not go beyond the context to find a description:

“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up [consume them], saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 4:1).

As to character, “that day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Zephaniah 1:15).

The foes of Christ will be hardened, as was Pharaoh. There will be wars, pestilences, earthquakes of great magnitude, dreadful suspense and anguish. The details are given in Revelation chapters 6 to 19.

But the questions asked are not without purpose: “Who may abide?” and “Who shall stand?” (Malachi 3:2). Obviously, if any are to abide or stand, there must, of necessity, be divine intervention. And there will be.

John, in his apocalyptic vision, relates, “I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried in a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” (Revelation 7:2-3).

THE MESSIANIC PURGE

“He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi” (Malachi 3:3).

Here is a new portrait of Messiah, a necessary portrait, if the blessings He holds in store for Israel (and the earth) are to be bestowed. “Shall sit” refers not so much to posture as to position, the work He must accomplish.

“The refiner’s art consisted in the separation of the dross from the pure ore, which was effected by reducing the metal to a fluid state by the application of heat, and by the aid of solvents, such as alkali (cf. Isaiah 1:25), which, amalgamating with the dross, permitted the extraction of the unadulterated metal” (Smith’s Bible Dict.).

It is evident, therefore, that there remains a preciousness in His people in spite of ages of departure, and it will be as pure gold when the dross of unbelief is purged away. The Refiner's fire (judgment) is said to be like "fuller's soap."

The word "fuller", as a basic root, means "to trample" as in the process of washing. Oriental women in early days used their feet as an agitator in doing their laundry. This is an added reason why "shall sit" (Malachi 3:3) suggests position rather than posture. If it were to be taken literally, we would have Messiah sitting and trampling at one and the same time.

This is expressive terminology, albeit figurative. Messiah will purge out the dross. As the priesthood was first to be indicted (Malachi 1:6), so the priesthood ("Sons of Levi") are the first to be purged.

Verse 5 tells of Messiah's return (not here in His triumphal second advent) to His dealings with His people. It explains also that He himself has witnessed the transgressions and iniquities of His people. He will not only be a witness but the Judge as well.

The offenders are termed sorcerers, adulterers, false swearers, oppressors, and disregarded of strangers' rights (Malachi 3:5).

All of this impurity must go before fellowship with the Almighty and His people can be restored.

Jeremiah pleaded, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment [compassion]; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing" (Jeremiah 10:24).

The reason the Jews will not be exterminated, either by Antichrist in his persecution or by the Lord God in His purging, is stated in Malachi 3:6 : "For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (See Lamentations 3:22-23).

The coming of Messiah should have been as much of a purifying hope for the Old Testament saints as the coming of Christ is for the Church (1 John 3:3).

"That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Malachi 3:3).

That we are again projected into the future is apparent by the contrast between the insincere and feigned worship of Chapter I and the righteous worship alluded to in the above reference.

A new day will dawn! Messiah will set things right at His coming. It will necessitate a dross purging and refining, pursuant to which God's people will reflect a rightness in their attitudes and actions.

This will be especially manifest in their worship, and worship is a barometer of devotion. The Lord God cannot rest until this is accomplished (Isaiah 62:1). Then and then only will He evidence His pleasure. Israel shall be called, "Hephzibah-My delight is in her" (Isaiah 62:4 Robert Young).

"Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years" (Malachi 3:4).

This, of course, envisions the prophesied time when, not only will the people have the oil of joy instead of mourning (Isaiah 61:3), but the Lord will have honor instead of grief. He will have the deference due but so long denied Him. Instead of rebellion, there will be reverence; instead of treachery, there will be trustworthiness. When worship is pleasant to the Lord, all matters are

acceptable to Him for worship is the heartbeat of spiritual conduct. When worship is pleasant, it is a sweet-smelling savor. When it is unpleasant through corruptness it is a stench in His nostrils.

RETURN AND REHABILITATION

When the way of the believer fails to coincide with the will of the Lord, there is broken fellowship with its attendant loss. There is an alienation of affection, a misplaced devotion. Foreign interests usurp control of the heart. They become tenacious tenants and difficult to expel. Thus, as long as Ephraim (Israel) was joined to idols, the instruction was “let him alone” (Hosea 4:17). The bent toward diverting idols must be curbed and the perverseness of heart purged before one is amenable to the way of truth and righteousness. This is definitely prerequisite to acceptable worship, and this is precisely what this prophecy has in view.

The foregleam of this rehabilitation is nowhere so vividly developed as in Hosea 14:1-9. There, in prophetic portrayal, Ephraim (Israel) renounces his idolatry, testifying, “I have heard him [the Lord God], and observed him” (Hosea 14:8). Then, with the proper perspective, he assures, “The ways of the Lord are right, and the just [justified] shall walk in them” (Hosea 14:9).

These future developments in the wise and wonderful economy of God will involve:

(1) a resurrection of saved deceased Jews:

“Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel” (Ezekiel 37:12);

(2) a regathering of saved living Jews:

“Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land” (Ezekiel 37:21);

(3) and a revival:

“I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever . . . they shall not depart from me . . . Yea, I will rejoice over them” (Jeremiah 32:39-41).

Here, it should be emphasized that Jew and Gentile alike are lost in this day of grace if the provisions of the Saviour’s cross work are not appropriated by faith. In this respect, there is no difference “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

HEALING IN HIS WINGS

“But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2).

Deity, covered with the light as with a garment (Psalms 104:2), has been symbolized or manifested by such figures as a burning bush, a pillar of fire, the true Light, the bright and morning star, the Sun of righteousness. His Word also is spoken of as a lamp. (Psalms 119:105).

Israel’s sun had gone down while it was yet day (Jeremiah 15:9). That is, they were cut off, dispersed, before their day had been accomplished. They have trodden the path of darkness ever since; and, while the immediate future is more threatening than promising, light will return! Here is

the promise:

“I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations . . . thou shalt know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob . . . Thy sun shall no more go down” (Isaiah 60:15-16; Isaiah 60:20).

The Sun of righteousness will arise “unto you that fear my name” (Malachi 4:2).

This speaks of reverential trust or a state of godliness. Since “Sun of righteousness” here and “Saviour and Redeemer” in Isaiah 60:16 above are one and the same, it would seem that “who fear His name” is a designation for the saved.

When Christ returns for His Church, some will have died; some will be living. An identical situation will obtain with Israel. For the Church, there will be:

(1) a resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:16),

(2) a rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

For Israel, there will be, as stated above,

(1) a resurrection (Ezekiel 37:12),

(2) a regathering (Ezekiel 37:21).

The members of the Church will have a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44) in order to go into Heaven with the Lord. “We shall all be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51). “We shall be like him” (1 John 3:2).

There is nothing said about such a change for Israel since they are raised and regathered to enter the land (Ezekiel 37:12; Ezekiel 37:21; Jeremiah 32:37; Jeremiah 32:41).

“Healing in His wings” speaks of His power and His purpose to correct all ills and to set things right-the day of His triumph!

It will be a time of great celebration, when gladsome voices will mingle in saying, “Alleluia; salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God” (Revelation 19:1).

THE LIBERTY OF DELIVERANCE

“Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall” (Malachi 4:2).

More freely, this would read, “Ye shall go forth as calves out of the stall and grow.” A calf of the stall portrays an animal secured by a halter and confined to narrow quarters, rendered captive and deprived of freedom. To loose it and turn it into the pasture to prance at liberty as it grows is an apt illustration of Israel’s release from the oppression, persecution and displacement of these many centuries.

Yokes and bondage will be no more. Idolatry and self-will will cease. There is in the divine schedule of events a “set time” to favor Israel (Psalms 102:13), and this will be it.

“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14); and when the Lord thus shows mercy to His people, their joyful song of

dedication and devotion shall fill the air:

“Behold as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God” (Psalms 123:2).

A MARKED REVERSAL

“And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet” (Malachi 4:3).

All the manifold indignities and indecencies which marred Israel’s record are irrefutable proof that they allowed the wicked to triumph, to lead them astray.

They were tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. It was not always a living being who constituted an influencing and diverting enemy, such as those who introduced them to the golden calf dance (Exodus 32:1-35), or the escapade of Baal-peor (Numbers 25:1-18), or the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 7:18), or the weeping over Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14).

There were other wicked influences. These consisted of personal sins such as covetousness in the case of Achan (Joshua 7:21), jealousy, as when they asked for a king like the heathen (1 Samuel 11:1-9), rebellion (Jeremiah 44:17), and disobedience (Jeremiah 7:24). The day is coming when evil forces shall no more prevail. This is the power of God in fulfilling His holy purposes.

“I shall do this, saith the Lord” (Malachi 4:3), must be noted carefully. In New Testament expression, “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Php 2:13).

When God works, worship is pleasant, obedience is sweet, and praise is as natural as breathing.

A REMINDER

“Remember ye the law of Moses” (Malachi 4:4).

Apparently the millennial kingdom will have no laws other than those already given through Moses on Mt. Sinai, with the possible and probable addition of what King Emmanuel gave in His Sermon on the Mount, which antedated the Cross and was, therefore, under the old covenant.

All the finer points of jurisprudence in nations such as those composed of English-speaking peoples are derived from the Holy Scriptures. There can be no higher type of human deportment than that advocated in precepts of the Bible.

When the Law, this law of God’s Word (Isaiah 2:3), goes out from Jerusalem in Zion, then shall the swords be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruninghooks. They shall learn war no more. All suspicion and suspense shall disappear. Espionage, sabotage and inhuman carnage shall be things of the past. Arms races will be unheard of. Security pacts will be unnecessary. Destructive weapons will be converted in utilities for the benefit of mankind.

MESSIAH’S FORERUNNER

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5).

When the name is specifically mentioned and the office stated, there should be no confusion as to the identification. Language cannot be more explicit. This is a clear introduction: By no implication can Elijah be thought of as John the Baptizer, nor John as Elijah.

The only similarity between Elijah the Tishbite and John the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth is:

(1) that John, the forerunner of the Lord in His first advent, was to go “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17)-the same spirit and power Elijah will manifest as the forerunner of Christ in His second advent.

(2) There is a stated similarity in the purpose, though not in the execution of their ministry-“to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord.” Elijah will have power to withstand any enemy until his ministry is accomplished. Then the beast, ascending out of the bottomless pit, will kill him and the other witness (Revelation 11:7).

In verses 5 and 6 (Malachi 4:5-6) we are clearly and concisely told:

(1) when Elijah is to be sent;

(2) why he is to be sent;

(3) to whom he is to be sent;

(4) who does the sending.

When will Elijah be sent?

Let the Bible speak for itself. “Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5).

This period is referred to in Revelation 11:3-6. It is the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week (Daniel 9:27), the day of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). It will begin when the “abomination of desolation” shall “stand in the holy place” (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15). This period will be in duration three and one-half years, otherwise referred to as “time, times and half-time,” “forty-two months,” or “a thousand two hundred and three score days.”

Elijah is to be sent as one of the two special witnesses for the Lord in the Great Tribulation.

Why will Elijah be sent?

He will come to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6). This apparently is a double expression of a single fact- the restoration of affection toward the Lord God like unto that of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When the Lord was forced to declare His covenant people “Lo-ammi” (not My people) in Hosea 1:9, allowing them through their own self-destruction (Hosea 13:9) to be dispersed among the nations (Jeremiah 39:1), and to be “many days [now approximately 2500 years] without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice. . .” (Hosea 3:4), their hearts were removed far from Him (Isaiah 29:13), and their dealings with Him were not from the heart (Hosea 7:14). The blueprints of the Lord God call for a reversal of these conditions as follows:

“Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them . . . I will bring them again unto this place . . . and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them and of their children after them” (Jeremiah 32:37-39). God will use Elijah to bring this about.

To whom will Elijah be sent?

“Behold, I will send YOU Elijah” (Malachi 4:5).

Primarily, then, he will be sent to the children of “their fathers”; that is, to the descendants of Jacob, to Elijah’s own people as to the flesh. That the Lord is not through dealing with Israel is prodigiously revealed in the prophecies. The curtain fell before Israel’s day was done (Jeremiah 15:9). Her sun will rise and never more go down (Isaiah 60:20).

When God asked, “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter [who made the marred vessel over until his product pleased him]?” He meant that He would do the same with Israel which is the clay in His hand (Jeremiah 18:6; Isaiah 64:8).

And this He will surely do!

“Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah [My delight is in her]” (Isaiah 62:4).

The Lord will be restless until this is accomplished (Isaiah 62:1); and when it is accomplished, the nations will call them, “The holy people, the redeemed of the Lord” (Isaiah 62:12).

Jeremiah attempted this but failed. “Stand ye in the ways,” he appealed, “and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” The people brazenly answered, “We will not walk therein” (Jeremiah 6:16). Then they cast him into prison.

John the Baptist made a similar attempt (Luke 1:17) and he was decapitated as the people plunged onward in unbelief. In all three cases, the faithful spokesmen suffer in delivering the message. But Elijah will meet with success before he meets with martyrdom.

By whom will Elijah be sent?

“I [the Lord] will send you Elijah” (Malachi 4:5).

John, the forerunner of the Lord in His first advent, was “a man sent from God” (John 1:6). Elijah, the forerunner of the Lord in His second advent, likewise, will be a man sent from God, specially commissioned.

The Scriptures seem to leave no doubt about Elijah’s being one of the two special witnesses during the Great Tribulation period. The question naturally arises, who is the other witness? Who will be Elijah’s contemporary during that dreadful time? A surprising number of expositors favor Moses; a lesser number, Enoch. Of the two, Enoch would seem to be the more likely for the following reasons:

1. God’s Word is definite in stating that “it is appointed unto man ONCE to die” (Hebrews 9:27); and that “death hath passed upon ALL men” (Romans 5:12).

Now, if one of these witnesses of Revelation 11:1-19 is other than Elijah or Enoch, he will have died twice, for these two witnesses are to be killed (Revelation 11:7). If Enoch is not to be one of these witnesses, then he will not have died ONCE.

Until the Rapture and the intervention of our coming Lord, ALL men are under the appointment of death.

2. Enoch's message equips him admirably for a ministry during the Great Tribulation period. Here is the record of his prophesying:

First, "The Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 1:14).

Second, when Christ returns, He will "execute judgment upon all" (Jude 1:15).

3. If it be insisted that the one witness is to be Moses because the water is to be smitten and turn to blood, and plagues are to be called forth on the earth (Revelation 11:6), and Moses did both of these at a former time, let it be remembered:

(1) the turning of water to blood and producing plagues were by no means "exclusives" with Moses, thus robbing this suggestion of any support here. Aaron also performed such miracles (Exodus 8:6). Not only that, the magicians of Egypt did likewise, duplicating almost everything Moses did (Exodus 7:22; Exodus 8:7, etc.).

(2), if God gave Moses and Aaron that power in the days of old, and permitted heathen magicians to do the same, there can be no good reason to doubt that the Lord is able to grant such power to Enoch.

4. Since there are "ranks" (1 Corinthians 15:23), "parts" (Revelation 20:6) and "lots" (Daniel 12:13) to the First Resurrection, and since Moses "rests" with the other saved Jews of the old dispensation, and since their "lot" is to "stand" (be resurrected) at the end of the (1260) days or the end of the Great Tribulation (Daniel 12:13), Moses would still be in his grave while the two witnesses are prophesying.

5. If Moses is to be raised from the dead to be one of the two special witnesses of the Great Tribulation, and this is nowhere even intimated in the Bible, and since both witnesses are to be killed (Revelation 11:7), then Moses will have died TWICE. This cannot be, for the Bible teaches there will be no SECOND death for a believer.

6. Add to all of this the fact that, according to the plain statements of the text, BOTH witnesses will have power to shut up the heavens. BOTH will have power to turn the water to blood. BOTH will have power to smite the earth with plagues: "THESE have power to shut heaven. . . . and [these] have power over waters . . ." (Revelation 11:6). Neither one is limited in this unprecedented ministry to what he had done in the past.

7. It is not unusual strategy for an athletic coach to take two star players from the lineup for a more advantageous moment to place them in the field. Just so, the great God of the universe removed these two from the lineup of humanity without their tasting death (2 Kings 2:11; Hebrews 11:5) in order (presumably) to return them to the scene of human operation for a special ministry before death can strike them.

8. Also, since Elijah is to be sent particularly to witness to the Jewish people during the Great Tribulation, and since Gentiles are to be saved during that period, does it not seem plausible that Enoch, a non-Israelitish saint, might possibly have a message for the Gentiles, just as Peter was the apostle of the circumcision and Paul the apostle of the uncircumcision in the Church age? This in no wise implies a different message by each, but it does correlate with the fact that the gospel of the kingdom is to be preached to all nations.

PROPER PERCEPTION

“Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Malachi 3:18).

In that day, there will be no questioning of God’s love, no profaning His name, no corrupting His worship. They will have a clear understanding of God’s way and will, all because they will then be willing. This could have been their joyful lot from the beginning, but no one is so blind as the one who does not want to see.

To Jeremiah, they said harshly, “As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee” (Jeremiah 44:16).

The rebellious people to whom Hosea ministered were destined to disillusionment. They thought him foolish and irrational. The day was to come, and did, perhaps as they sat discouraged along the rivers in Babylon (Psalms 137:1-9), when they confessed the prophet was not a fool, the spiritual man was not mad (see Hosea 9:7).

The Roman centurion, directing the crucifixion, was also disillusioned. As the sky darkened and the thunder blasted and the lightning flashed and the earth quaked, he said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

The moral is, it is always wise to repose faith in God’s Word. His Word is entirely dependable (Psalms 119:128). It is certain of fulfillment (Acts 27:25).

HIS JEWELS

“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels” (Malachi 3:17).

The simile had a striking application when it comes to divine rewards. “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

“There is one glory of the sun, . . . and another glory of the stars, for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also in the resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:41-42).

The Lord God indicated particular delight in referring to the time of restoration. “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God” (Isaiah 62:3).

These are His jewels-His precious ones, His peculiar treasure (Deuteronomy 14:2).

“And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” (Malachi 3:17). To spare means to have compassion or pity.

God spared not His own Son (Romans 8:32), yet He spares those who are devoted to Him in worship and service. To be spared means to be spared from something or for something. Of course, the worst thing to be spared from is unbelief. The best thing to be spared for is the blessing and reward of the Lord. This is why Paul reiterated the statement, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren.” He was reflecting the desire of God.

The “sparing” refers to the day that will “burn as an oven” (Malachi 4:1), but it does not necessarily promise immunity from the inevitable persecution. It offers no hope of escaping the wrath of “the man of sin.” It would seem that it is not a sparing FROM but a sparing FOR. They will be sealed. They will be sustained. They will be assured of divine rescue. They will be overcomers by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Revelation 12:11). They will not fear him who destroys the body but cannot destroy the soul.

This closing book of the Old Testament has but four brief chapters, containing a total of only fifty-five verses, less than many single chapters in both Old and New Testaments. To study it, one must be prompted to say, “Multum in parvol”-much in little. Like the massive roots of a willow tree, much of its message is not seen on the surface. It reaches into almost every book in the Bible. It towers as a gigantic antenna with guy wires anchored firmly in the eternal inspiration of Deity.

It beams its challenging revelation:

(1) to the people contemporary with its delivery,

(2) as a warning to those to whom the ends of the age are imminent (1 Corinthians 10:11).

It is monumental to the love and patience of the Lord God. It is likewise exhibit No. 1 read into the eternal record concerning the deceitfulness, rebellion, irreverence and sacrilege of the human heart.

God’s people condoned what He condemned; went against His warning; and denied Him what He desired.

As their accelerated plunge toward the day of reckoning sent them near the precipice, the Lord wrote the epitaph, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself” (Hosea 13:9). He also assured, “I know the plans I am planning, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, lit.).

Trite comments have been made about the Old Testament ending with the word “curse;” But this is not the major note of the verse. It is an alternate word. It would be well to observe that climactic notes are predominant in all but the first verse of the last chapter.

- In verse 2, there is promised healing and liberation.

- In verse 3, there is triumph over wickedness.

- In verse 4, there is continuation of immutable divine Truth.

- In verse 5, the successful forerunner comes into view.

- In verse 6, there is a return to basic principles, when the disobedient shall be turned to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

Here Malachi ends.

Here the Lord God rests His case.

~ end of book ~

Chapter 74

05.00.1-THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK

by

S. Franklin Logsdon

"It is expedient for you that I go away . . . I will send him unto you"

05.00.2- Preface to the-Sword Edition

Preface to the e-Sword Edition When I first discovered the amazing power of e-Sword, I was connected to the internet with a 56k fax modem. My enthusiasm for the program and its plethora of resources motivated me to stay up all night downloading its riches. I spent the next several days exploring the amazing variety of study material. As a busy pastor, I've tried to assemble a classic research library. As a busy pastor of a small church, I've tried to inexpensively assemble a classic research library. E-Sword immediately added many valuable assets that I hadn't yet purchased; and those resources that e-Sword duplicated were much easier and faster to use than the paper versions.

Since that wonderful first week, I've discovered many more treasures through Google searches. Then one day I realized that I owed a debt. I made a contribution to Rick Meyers (Rick - you are the modern day Gutenberg; should the Lord not return in the near future like I believe He will, you will do for Bible study the next 100 years what Gutenberg did in the 1500's), and then started looking for public domain resources to convert to .topx files. And so my personal journey has come full circle: from the excitement of discovering e-Sword to the excitement of creating .topx files for others. Like Rick quotes from Matthew 10:8, "freely ye have received, freely give."

Thank you, Dear Family, for understanding my debt and graciously tolerating my near compulsive computer use for hours on end. My thanks to the creator of e-Sword, Rick Meyers - www.e-sword.net. Thank you, S. Franklin Logsdon, for converting your studies into eternal print. A very special thanks goes out to Brother Virgil Butts. He is the man who painstakingly typed out this manuscript. This - and many other excellent biographies and reference works - are available at his website www.baptistbiblebelievers.com. Visit him often! I would also be remiss to neglect to mention Mr. Jason Briggs, Mr. Ed Sandlin, & Mrs. Pamela Marshall, who have so enriched my own ministry. And of course most of all, thank You Lord Jesus for saving my soul for all eternity. This Edition There have been no changes made to Brother Virgil's manuscript of Logsdon's work, except for the following:

Scripture references have been converted to Scripture hyperlinks using the "Format Scripture ToolTip."

A few obvious Scripture reference errors have been corrected, as well as some obvious spelling errors.

The copy and paste process may have unfortunately removed some of the italicized print. While the words have not been changed, some of Logsdon's emphasis may be missing. It is with regret that I have not taken the time to correct this. The sense is still accurate. [By the way - would you understand this paragraph without italics? Of course!] Also, the italicizing of the foreign words have been lost. It is my hope that the reader will be able to follow the flow regardless of these flaws. They - the flaws - are mine, not Logsdon's.

I am quite sure my edition of Logsdon's work is rather imperfect. I pray that, nonetheless, it will be productively useful in the study of God's Word.

Finally

If you haven't joined the e-Sword Users group, visit www.e-sword-users.org and check it out. This is a free group, with lots of third-party resources (like this one!) and help from other e-Sword users. May the Lord bless you as study His word.

Dr. David Thomason

Florida, 2010

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05.00.4- Table of Contents

Table of Contents 01. THE SPIRIT CAME TO MEN - "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind"

02. THE SPIRIT GLORIFIES THE SON - "He shall glorify me . . ."

03. THE SPIRIT BAPTIZES INTO CHRIST - "For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body"

04. THE SPIRIT INDWELLS THE SAINT - "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?"

05. THE SPIRIT WORKS IN PEOPLE - "It is God which worketh in you"

06. THE SPIRIT GUIDES THE BELIEVER - "He will guide you into all truth"

07. THE SPIRIT GIVES ASSURANCE - "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit"

08. THE SPIRIT PROVIDES POWER - "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord"

09. THE SPIRIT FLOWS THROUGH HEARTS - "This spake he of the Spirit"

10. THE SPIRIT OPERATES IN PRAYER - "The Spirit maketh intercession for us"

11. THE SPIRIT WALKS WITH CHRISTIANS - "Walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost"

12. THE SPIRIT CONVINCES OF SIN - "He will reprove the world of sin"

13. THE SPIRIT ENLARGES VISION - "The Spirit lifted me up . . . and brought me"

14. THE SPIRIT KNOWS THE FUTURE - "He will show you things to come"

15. THE SPIRIT POSES A QUESTION - "What manner of persons ought ye to be?"

16. THE SPIRIT AND THE ONE BAPTISM - "One Lord, one faith, one baptism"

17. THE SPIRIT UNKNOWN TO MANY - "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost"

05.00.5- Preface

Preface THE HOLY SPIRIT is the Administrator of the divine economy

We deal with Him, else we are out of touch with Heaven.

We yield to His gracious promptings, or we submerge ourselves in the futility of self-will.

We receive of His strength, or we remain impotent.

Our eyes will be unopened; our minds unenlightened; our hearts unaffected; our feet not led. The Holy Spirit is not only the Administrator of the divine economy, He is also the Author of divine Revelation.

He employed human instrumentality, but the Bible is His production.

Holy men of old were borne along by His power and direction (2 Peter 1:21).

He wove the element of life into its lines as the wool is woven into the fabric (1 Peter 1:23).

He infused into its texture the manna of Heaven to nourish the life it produces (Job 23:12; 2 Peter 1:3).

He electrified its content with hallowed illumination capable of dissipating the densest darkness along our wilderness pathway (Psalms 119:105).

He incorporated a power within its message to bulwark the believer against the militating forces of evil.

He built into its structure a potent provision capable of dismantling the strongholds of Satan.

The Holy Spirit is the Lord of the harvest. He controls the workers in the field, which is the world, by empowering, directing and prospering. Where there is a lack of acquaintanceship with Him, there will be proportionately a lack of service for Him. Where there is a lack of service, there will be a lack of reward.

Meanwhile, the work which He designed will be unaccomplished. Then declension ensues-spiritual darkness sets in; saints weaken; the church limps and lags; and the unconverted plunge unchecked toward disillusionment and doom. The Holy Spirit has power to regenerate, providing a new nature;

to sanctify, producing a new character;

to energize, promoting a new fruitfulness;

to illuminate, presenting a new vision.

Yet, to the multitudes, this member of the Godhead is no more than a fantasy or a mere influence. We tremble at the consequences of inattention, indeed willful rejection, exhibited so prevailingly

with regard to His presence and purpose. This can only invite sorrow, defeat and eternal loss. The considerations of the Spirit’s ministry in this volume, although not exhaustive, cover a wide area of important, practical truth. May His tender entreaties and gracious promptings find in each of us a perceptible yieldedness, indeed a full surrender to His control!

- S. F. L.

05.01- CHAPTER ONE -- THE SPIRIT CAME TO MEN

CHAPTER ONE -- THE SPIRIT CAME TO MEN

"Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind."

THE ACCOUNT of the Holy Spirit's descent is not a newsman's report. The diction is distinctly and decidedly in keeping with the uniqueness of the event. When God wrote about His physical creation, He presented it in a mere paragraph. When He related the joyful account of His Son's incarnation, He simply stated, "Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise." Concerning the coming of the Comforter, the statements are noticeably few yet amazingly expressive. There is reference to sound, suddenness and supernatural signs. Then, when He was manifested, He ministered. The age of the Spirit had opened.

NEW PHASE OF DIVINE OPERATION

Crowds were common sights in Jerusalem on feast days. Many other features were ordinary about this particular day, but the fire and wind were phenomenal. They marked the dawn of a new era. As the old order changes, God fulfills Himself in many ways; but Pentecost was singular in its display of the unusual. There will be no other.

Bethlehem witnessed the humbling and Jerusalem the humiliation of Deity. The manger was inglorious and the cross ignominious, but from the empty tomb to the final triumph, omnipotence no longer will be concealed in the motions and movements of God. All divine manifestations must be mighty forevermore.

If there is fire, it will be striking in its appearance.

If there is wind attending His operations, it will differ in its current.

If there is power, it will defy description.

If there are divine announcements, they will stagger the intellect.

This was Pentecost.

It was not a celestial enactment with a terrestrial setting. It was statedly a new phase of an infinite plan launched supernaturally at a scheduled time. It swept men along with its irresistible force. Human faculties were energized in a miraculous manner. Hearts were overwhelmed in an atmosphere unknown before. The wood of the manger may have mocked the Son made flesh, but the timbers of the house trembled when the Spirit was revealed. It was the debut of Deity. The Manifestation of Power

The coming of the Holy Spirit was more dynamic than dramatic. His advent was designed, not to be picturesque, but potent. The Lord Jesus inferred this in His post-resurrection meeting with the apostles. He promised that the Spirit's appearing would be accompanied by exceptional power.

They could not escape the point that this power would be both evident and experiential.

"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," they were informed (Acts 1:8).

Then they would understand why Jesus had told them not to let their hearts be troubled by virtue of His own departure (John 14:1).

They would no more become drowsy and slumber-laden in a crucial hour (Mark 14:40).

They would never again flinch and falter and fall before an accuser (Matthew 26:72).

They would never again have sealed eyes concerning the unfolding plan and purpose of God (Luke 18:34).

They would have power-enlightening, sustaining, directing, triumphing.

They would have the Holy Spirit in them.

Diverse Reactions There were two distinct reactions on the part of the people in Jerusalem that day concerning the Spirit’s advent.

Some marveled; others mocked.

One group said, "What meaneth this?" The other, "These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2:12-13).

The former were interested; the latter, critical.

The reader will observe three salutations in Peter’s address.

In the first, He answers the critical (Acts 2:14).

In the second, he reasons with the interested (Acts 2:22).

In the third (Acts 2:36), he registers his challenge with "all the house of Israel" - a message of paramount importance to all regardless of their attitude.

He speaks to the critical first, saying: "Hearken to my words . . . [It was not necessary to ask for a hearing of the interested.] This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:14; Acts 2:16). Of all parts of speech, the demonstrative is the most specific. It pinpoints the object in view. It is the index finger of grammar. The word "this" in the text points either to the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy or simply a reference to it. Note well, the quoted prophecy has to do with wonders in the heavens (Acts 2:19). The matter at hand was a development on earth. Since the sun did not turn to darkness or the moon to blood, this was not a fulfillment (or even a partial fulfillment) of what Joel predicted. The word "this" simply directed the critics to an Old Testament reference to Scriptures they were expected to revere.

More freely, Peter was saying: "But if you think these developments incredible, then listen to this which I am about to quote which was spoken to the prophet Joel." Then the quotation follows. The inference is, "Was Joel drunk with wine? And, further, if God can at some time show wonders in the sky, can He not now show wonders on the earth?"

Having disposed of the critics, Peter turns to the interested. His explanation begins at verse Acts 2:23. The climactic point of his address is reached in verse Acts 2:36 where he labors the fact that "all the house of Israel" (the critics and the concerned alike) must know that Jesus, who, though crucified, was and is both Lord and Christ. Then the Holy Spirit began to pierce them through with conviction (v. Acts 2:37). The Final Instructions

Although our Lord’s resurrection victory credentials had been presented in "many infallible proofs," selfish ideas coupled with imperfect knowledge caused the apostles to jump at conclusions, even wrong conclusions, as they began to revel in an impression. The earthly kingdom forged to the fore in their minds (Acts 1:7).

They visualized the Sovereign and the subjects.

They envisioned privilege and prosperity.

What they must visualize is the Saviour and sinners.

What they must envision is an offensive and an opposition-but obedience, hardship but happiness, warfare but willingness, viciousness but victory.

Before His ascension, Jesus set the stage for the next development in the divine economy. The final instructions were summed up solemnly in these words: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

All questions ceased.

National interests gave way to global concern. A new, vital outlook settled upon them. Then the pierced feet of the Saviour left the dusty surface of His footstool. The clouds folded their fluffy arms about the ascending High Priest who sat down at the right hand of God, there to witness the preparation, progress and productiveness of the commissioned devotees. The Commission Concept

Those who were waiting faithfully, those who were prayerfully expectant were all in one accord. This means more than freedom from disputation. How could people pray together for ten days if they were in verbal conflict? But does it simply mean that they were free of disunity? That harmony reigned? It is more significant than this. People who pray together are welded together. Not only were they in accord with one another, they were all in accord with the commission which they had received from the Lord. They were ready to witness when the enduement of power was received. Were this not true, why did they tarry for the power to do so? The great difficulty today is that people who claim to be followers of Christ are not in accord with His commission. He wants witnesses. Witnesses need power. Power comes from and through the Holy Spirit. This power is only entrusted to those who are dedicated to witness for the Lord. Never forget, this commission is still in vogue. We are to witness to the resurrected Christ. Because He lives, our faith is valid and our preaching profitable. The Appointed Place These dedicated, obedient, praying people were not only in one accord, but they were in one place.

There is only one place for a true servant of the Most High. It is the place of His appointment. It almost staggers the imagination to think of what would be the outcome if every Christian were to occupy the place of the Lord’s assignment.

What a mighty impact would be made upon this dying world!

What a stunning blow could be registered against Satan and his dominion!

The church could rise from its pathetic defeat and put him to flight.

But what are the facts? Simply these:

Posts are not being manned.

Positions are not being filled.

Christians are powerless, careless, listless, complacent.

Many are neither in accord with the commission of the Lord, nor in the place of His appointment. Internal deterioration more than any other factor has hindered the ministry of the church and sabotaged the work of the Spirit. The Great Day of Promise

Then came the day of Pentecost. It is juvenile to think the Spirit might have come sooner if the people had prayed more enthusiastically. It is just as immature to believe that their praying brought Him. Divine plans are inexorable. They know no fluctuations. Yes, the day had come. For the Jews, who were gathered together in Jerusalem from many countries, it marked the feast of harvest. It was also the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

All divine movements are characterized by supernaturalness.

This was true on the Mount of Transfiguration,

This was true at the manger in Bethlehem,

This was true in the manifestation of the Spirit’s coming.

An unusual sound reached their ears; a unique sight met their eyes.

The sound was supernal because it was "from heaven."

The sound was sudden because it was "as of a rushing mighty wind."

The sound was surprising because "it filled the house."

God was present with power. The promise of Christ was being fulfilled. The Son sat down with the Father in Heaven. Now the Spirit sits on men on earth. Now the commission can begin. And how choice are the figures employed- tongues, fire! The fundamental function of the tongue of a Christian is fourfold:

(1) To sing forth God’s praise (2) To sound forth His love (3) To supplicate His throne (4) To send out His Gospel The Vanguard of a New Message The Holy Spirit loses no time when He has a prepared people. He loosed their tongues, lifted their voices, and led them forth. But the fire was necessary too. The tongues and fire combine to illustrate the completeness of equipment for those who witness to the glory and grace of God. The suggestiveness in the figures is most extensive-too much so for many of the enlightening details in this writing. But as witnesses they were to possess a zeal and to constitute a light.

"Ye are the light of the world," Jesus said. Now that light was to shine, even unto the darkened uttermost part of the earth. As a matter of fact, what took place on the Day of Pentecost was, in miniature, a preview of the over-all picture of the church witnessing for Christ to the ends of the earth, to the end of the age, telling forth His Word and presenting His claims in all the languages of men. In this connection, it must be clearly noted that they spoke in "other tongues" and not in unknown tongues-that is, tongues other than their own. Why? The text plainly states that the people in Jerusalem on that particular day were from "every nation under heaven." How could these apostles talk to people who did not understand their language?

One of two things had to take place if a witness were to be borne. Either the foreigners would have to understand the language of the witnesses, or the witnesses would have to speak the languages of the foreigners. In either case, a miracle was necessary. The Lord chose to work through the witnesses.

Hence, He empowered them to communicate to the throngs. They spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. And what they spoke was understood by those of foreign countries. In utter amazement, the people said: "How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?" The answer is simple:

First, the Holy Spirit proved His power.

Second, He presented His pattern for world evangelism.

People of all nations must be addressed in their native tongue. The Bud and the Blossom

If it be asked why the Holy Spirit does not today grant miraculously and immediately the ability to speak in the almost three thousand tongues and dialects in the world, we can only answer that His ways are not our ways. However, while witnesses must follow natural courses in order to converse in French, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese and other languages, it is still true that the Holy Spirit enables missionaries to grasp the languages, and the Gospel is reaching out to the ends of the earth. On the Day of Pentecost, this special power was given. That day, some three thousand were saved. That day, some three thousand more witnesses were added to those who had been welded together by the fire of the Spirit into one body.

John, in his apocalyptic vision, heard a voice. He turned "to see the voice" (Revelation 1:12). Upon turning, he saw seven lamp-stands, symbolic by his own explanation of the seven churches, which in turn are probably pictorial of the whole Church era. In the midst of them he saw the Lord Jesus. Now what was the voice which was "as the sound of many waters"? It was the voice of divine testimony through many witnesses agelong and worldwide. It was the Lord speaking through His messengers.

Thus, what we found in embryo on the Day of Pentecost we will find in full development in the Book of the consummation where jubilant saints are singing a new song -a song of redemption. We observe that they are "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation."

Who told each one about the Saviour?

How did they learn about redemption?

Through witnesses, sent-ones, Spirit-led individuals. Each heard the Good News in his own tongue. Thus, the Gospel goes to the uttermost part-quickening, enlightening, gladdening hearts of people everywhere with a pervasive hope.

05.02- CHAPTER TWO -- THE SPIRIT GLORIFIES THE SON

CHAPTER TWO -- THE SPIRIT GLORIFIES THE SON

"He shall glorify me . . ."

The son of God and the Spirit of God were not strangers one to the other. They always were, are and ever shall be one with each other in the Godhead. Their distinct manifestations and differing ministrations must not confuse this fact in our thinking.

The Son knew the Spirit would come.

The Spirit knew the Son had come.

Each knew well why the other was so manifested. Jesus knew what the Spirit would do when He came, and the Spirit knew what Jesus had done when He was here. While the Spirit came to apply the provisions of Christ, He came equally to exalt the Person of Christ. "He shall glorify me," the Saviour assured. The Spirit’s attention to the Lord Jesus Christ enjoys an impressive emphasis in the Scriptures. This allures our thoughts into realms of the most fascinating discovery. "I lay down my life" (John 10:17), Jesus explained. This was expressly the reason for His coming to earth. And what a significant thing it was! But in almost every other instance in the earthly movements of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit is accredited with the promoting energy.

We will observe some of the prominent instances of this fact.

Jesus Begotten of the Spirit

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:18).

How an ocean of deity could flow into a little eddy of humanity and still be God, is, according to Paul, "without controversy, a great mystery" (1 Timothy 3:16). The birth of Christ was not only a miracle of which God was the Creator, but a miracle of which He was the center.

It involved:

the plan of the Godhead,

the anticipation of the prophets,

the annunciation of the messengers,

the expectation of Mary,

the incarnation of Christ,

the jubilation of the angels,

the adoration of the Magi,

the vituperation of Herod,

the salvation of men.

It put:

a Branch in a manger (Isaiah 11:1),

the living Word on a dead tree (John 1:1),

a Man in the glory (1 Timothy 2:5),

a Lamb on the throne (Revelation 7:17).

It also put wounds in the King Eternal (Zechariah 13:6). The introduction of Christ to earth in human form was without precedent or possible repetition. Heaven had acted. Its uniqueness may be partially comprehended when we observe that Heaven’s only Lord, creation’s only Originator, and earth’s only Saviour has now been revealed in human form. This amazing matter is attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Directed of the Spirit "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1). The apparent subserviency of the Lord Jesus Christ to both the Father and the Spirit is but a further proof of His voluntary condescension-the limitations of a self-imposed humbling (Php 2:8). And in this self-emptied state (the Kenosis), as decreed by the counsels of the Almighty in the unknowable past, direction for all the moves of the Lord Jesus Christ was to come from the blessed Holy Spirit. When the Spirit led the Saviour into the wilderness, it was not for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not He could stand the test, but rather to prove that He could not fail the test. As the first Adam was tested in a garden for obedience, the last Adam was tested in the wilderness for righteousness. It is ever unrighteous to yield to Satan. Jesus did not yield. Being led is something of a surrender of one’s will. This was true of the Lord Jesus in His submission as it is true of the Christian in his dedication. "I came down from heaven," Jesus explained, "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). In surrendering His will, the Holy Spirit led. The text tells us that Jesus was "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness."

The Spirit led Him in the forty days and forty nights of fasting.

The Spirit led Him through the whole gamut of testing.

The victory was decisive.

"Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Matthew 4:11). When the Spirit leads, Satan must leave; and how wonderful to have the "ministering spirits" instead of the "messengers of Satan"! The strategy of Satan in the wilderness temptation of our Lord epitomizes the conflict which the Christian has in his wilderness journey-"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

What people will do for appetite, appearance and applause is a drama of universal proportions filled with vanity, eternal loss and endless remorse. Only those who are led by the Spirit can join gratefully with the apostle in exulting: "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to

triumph in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Jesus Identified by the Spirit

"He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him" (Matthew 3:16). The word, "lighting," means to come, to appear, to come from another place, to publicly appear, to be manifested in approval.

Here on the banks of the historic Jordan, the Saviour assured: "It becometh us [Father, Son and Holy Spirit] to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). The pictorial suggestion is overwhelming.

The baptism symbolized the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The descending dove prefigured the advent of the Comforter,

The voice from Heaven bespoke the approval of the Father.

John the Baptist had said: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Now the Father Himself says: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

Jesus Anointed of the Spirit

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me" (Luke 4:18), Jesus explained as He began His public ministry. As Jesus stood to read the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah, we cannot but believe He emphasized the personal pronouns. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . he hath anointed me . . . he hath sent me''

He was concerned about the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind, the bruised.

He was the wealth of Heaven to the poor,

He was the comfort of Heaven to the brokenhearted,

He was the power of Heaven to the captives,

He was the light of glory to the blind,

He was the balm of Gilead to the bruised.

He is still all this and more.

To make people rich, He became poor;

To bring comfort to the broken-hearted, He suffered;

To deliver the captives, He was led captive;

To produce light for the blind, He was enshrouded with darkness;

To heal the bruised, He was wounded and afflicted.

Jesus was anointed of the Spirit to "preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19). The word "acceptable" (dektos) means the approved or propitious time. How appropriate was this statement at the beginning of our Lord’s earthly ministry! The apostle Paul employed the same word with a

prefix for emphasis: "Now is the accepted time," he pleaded; "behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). There is no time more propitious than now. When we remember that Jesus spake as never man spake, that His words were quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, we can well understand why "the eyes of all . . . were fastened on him" (Luke 4:20). Jesus was anointed of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was Empowered of the Spirit "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit unto Galilee" (Luke 4:14).

Here is a glimpse of His return from the wilderness temptation. What was true of Jesus in this instance, may it be the triumphant experience of the Christian! To encounter the foe under the leadership of the Spirit guarantees a victorious return in the power of the same conquering One.

It is a rather forbidding venture to attempt an analysis of the extent to which Jesus surrendered His power while in the body of humiliation. Apart from His work on the cross, it is not evident that Jesus operated apart from the Spirit's power. His many miraculous ministrations were, as we noted-earlier, in the anointing of the Spirit. However, when the work on the cross had been fully accomplished, Jesus once again exercised His ever appropriate omnipotence as the eternal Logos without whom "was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3). Jesus said, following His resurrection, "All power in heaven and earth is given unto me."

Jesus Is Glorified by the Spirit When Jesus was comforting His sorrowful disciples by announcing that another Comforter would come, even the Holy Spirit, He said, "He shall glorify me" (John 16:14). There was a specific way in which the Holy Spirit was to glorify the Lord Jesus, and indeed has. "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you," Jesus explained. This "showing" is twofold in character:

(1) in the inspired Page, (2) in His manifested power. The Bible lives because it presents the Living One. The word portraits of Him are glimpses of grandeur which exhilarate our spirits and challenge our hearts.

They open the eyes of our understanding.

They leave us with no excuse for our fearful failures in life.

They allure our vision to heavenly heights

They introduce us to the rapturous joy of being in the center of God's will.

All through the inspired Record, the Holy Spirit reveals and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ in His anointed ministry:

unlocking the ears of the deaf;

unloosing the tongues of the mute;

healing the troubled breasts;

blessing the living;

raising the dead,

dispelling the demons;

transforming men.

How desperately we need to have demonstrated the presence of the Lord in our midst!

We speak about the power of God, but remain impotent.

We speak about His supernaturalness, but operate in the unprofitableness of the flesh.

We speak about the outpouring of His Spirit, but find ourselves in the midst of a dreadful spiritual dearth.

Oh, for a manifestation of His power!

05.03- CHAPTER THREE -- THE SPIRIT BAPTIZES...

CHAPTER THREE -- THE SPIRIT BAPTIZES INTO CHRIST

"For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body."

The church, which consists of that company of people who have reposed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is variously designated in the Scriptures. There are such references as:

the building (Ephesians 2:21),

the body (Colossians 1:18),

the bride (Ephesians 5:30-31).

The church is not an Old Testament institution. Its description, duties and destiny cannot be found in the Old Covenant. The spotlight in that ancient day focused upon a nation called out from the people (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), while in the New Covenant we find a people called out from the nations (Acts 15:14). Even a hasty perusal of the position, provisions and prospect will convince one that the church, which is the Body of Christ, is indeed a "new thing" in the divine economy.

It is an interesting engagement to observe the church’s foundation, formation, features, faculties, functions, faith, fellowship and future, and to witness the Spirit’s constant ministry in making these glorious facts real and vital and enjoyable in the experience and outlook of the true believer. The Foundation.

Two matters of great significance must be perceived and believed:

(1) the church’s foundation is unique. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11);

(2) the church’s foundation is sure. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

Here is sufficient fact:

to stabilize the Christian’s hope,

to bolster his faith,

to stimulate his devotion,

to encourage his steadfastness

to increase his expectation.

The foundation is unique because it is Christ Himself. It is sure for the same reason. Because He is eternal, all that He represents is eternal. Those who are identified with Him by faith are on the only true foundation and can rest in the assurance of its enduring stability. The Formation. The

calling out of a people for His name is the wonderful theme of the glorious Gospel. This divine operation is characterized after this manner:

God "hath quickened us together . . . and raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:5-6).

Also, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

And further, "to make in himself of twain one new man" (Ephesians 2:15).

In these instances-in every instance-the operation is centered "in Christ." His positional emphasis is always central from the "tree of life" in the midst of the Garden of Eden in Genesis to the Lamb in the midst of the throne in Revelation. Where even two or three are gathered together in His name He is in the midst, and Calvary was no exception, for on either side was a malefactor and Jesus in the center.

Integrating into "one body" those who believe on and receive the Lord Jesus Christ is the Holy Spirit’s baptizing ministry, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." This of course is not synonymous with joining a church, being baptized with water, or subscribing to a creed. Neither is it the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5, which, by virtue of its position in the epistle, has to do with practice and not the position, with the walk and not with the birth of the Christian. (See chap., p. 132.)

Some think the baptizing of believers into "one body" did not begin until Paul turned to the Gentiles. But three times did Paul turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; Acts 18:6; Acts 28:28).

However, there were not three beginnings of the baptizing work of the Spirit, nor was its beginning dependent upon what any man did or did not do. Jesus said: "Ye shall be baptized with [or in] the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). Thus, the formation of the "body of Christ" began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts Chapter 2) and continues in its development with the regeneration of each believing sinner. This began at Jerusalem where our Lord said it would begin (Luke 24:47), and will continue until the rapture takes place. The Features and Functions.

It is most interesting to study the composition of the Church as the Body of Christ.

There is multiplicity for there are "many members" (1 Corinthians 12:20).

There is unity because there is but "one body" (1 Corinthians 12:20).

There is compactness for "the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted" (Ephesians 4:16).

There is sympathy since "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Concerning the many members, it must be observed that, "Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him" (1 Corinthians 12:18). He gave to the human body two ears, two eyes, two hands, two feet, one mouth, one tongue, one heart, etc. The psalmist exclaimed, "Man is wonderfully and fearfully made." Shakespeare commented: "What a piece of work is a man! How infinite in faculty!" The Church is just as amazingly constructed since in each

case the Architect and Builder is God. The unity of the Body of Christ, though little understood, is of tremendous importance. "By him all things consist" (Colossians 1:17), or are held together. "All things" means everything from the infinitesimal atom to the largest planet-everything that is. It is only when man causes the neutrons to attack the nucleus of the atom that explosions ensue. The unity is broken. It is only when Satan causes unspiritual attitudes and actions to attack the cohesive peace of the Church that disturbances in the work of the Lord result. Then the Spirit's operations are hindered. Man cannot produce the unity, but he is strongly exhorted to preserve it (Ephesians 4:3). The suffering of all members when one suffers does not mean that when one has a pain all in the church feel the same discomfort, even though there should be prayerful interest. The verse which precedes this mention of suffering (1 Corinthians 12:25) clearly indicates that this matter has to do with divisions. Thus, when one member suffers from satanic influence, the whole assembly is affected. One does not need a rifle or revolver, a dagger or hand grenade to cut a swath through the peace and productiveness of a local church. It can be accomplished just as effectively by gossip, unforgiveness or unconfessed sin. Those who suffer these spiritual maladies without applying the remedy of the Word impose an unspeakable hardship upon the whole cause of Christ. And concerning the compactness of the body, we have but one brief observation. To make this possible, the precious Saviour endured at Calvary, not one but a thousand deaths, as all His bones were out of joint (Psalms 22:14). The Faculties. The word "faculty" is defined as "ability to act or do; power or prerogative given or conferred." And in the Body of Christ this conferred ability is evidenced in a diversity of gifts, in differences of administrations, and in a variety of operations (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). The varied gifts are displayed in many engagements, all controlled by one sovereign Head contributing to one glorious end. One may go "down to the battle"; another tarry "by the stuff" (1 Samuel 30:24). Each member of the body has its necessary place. The foot cannot deny its function; nor the ear; nor yet the eye (1 Corinthians 12:15-16). It is the co-ordination of the many members which gives to the body the productivity divinely desired. The Faith.

Faith is like fuel.

Fuel gives warmth to the home; faith gives warmth to the heart.

Fuel gives power to the machinery of men; faith gives power to the messengers of God.

But we need not burden ourselves with calculations of btu's or measurements of horsepower, for all spiritual matters are characterized by the most impressive simplicity. We are clearly told that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Faith is a most necessary commodity for the believer. The Christian:

walks by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7);

works by faith (Hebrews 11:33);

wins by faith (1 John 5:4);

prays by faith (Hebrews 11:6);

anticipates by faith (Hebrews 11:26 b);

was saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8).

Since the Holy Spirit is the Author, the Conveyor and the Interpreter of the Word, and since the Word is the source of faith, one begins to appreciate how vital is the ministry of the Spirit. The Fellowship.

What fellowship really is and with whom we enjoy it are fundamental considerations.

Fellowship is possible for those who:

stand on common ground,

think similar thoughts

delight in like matters of interest.

These conditions having been met in the reconciliation of the believer to God through the regeneration of the Spirit, enabled the beloved apostle to assert: "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). To emphasize this glorious truth, we may ask some simple questions, letting the text answer:

What may we have with God? "Fellowship."

Is such fellowship assured? "Truly."

Whose fellowship is it? "Our[s]."

With whom do we have fellowship? "God."

When may we have this fellowship? "Now" (is).

This is possible whether or not the Christian knows it.

He may know it but not believe it.

He may believe it but not enjoy it.

But he cannot have it without knowing Him;

He cannot enjoy it without meeting the conditions.

These conditions may be summarized as:

(1) acquaintanceship with the Lord (Job 22:21);

(2) reception of His Word (Job 22:22);

(3) application of His Word (James 1:22);

(4) cleansing of the heart (Job 22:23).

These Old Testament references are cited because they are appropriate and because dispensational lines can never isolate unchangeable principles. With the apostle Paul we must learn that to lay the groundwork for an out-and-out fellowship with God, there is no starting point without the dissolution of all self-interest. He was willing to count all things but loss for the

excellency of the (experiential) knowledge of the Lord.

We too must have an unqualified willingness:

to make our life one of constant communion with God;

to make God's Word the sole rule of our faith and practice;

to make God's glory our end in all actions;

to make it our endeavor to please Him at all times;

to make His will our strongest desire;

to make His designs our chief delight;

to be workers together with Him in an actual way.

Promotion of such fellowship with God depends upon frequency in prayer, constancy in service and consistency in living. The activating factor is need; the motivating force is love; the stimulating incentive is hope. When we add to all this the fact that the heart of God longs for fellowship with His people, this should be an appealing matter indeed.

05.04- CHAPTER FOUR -- THE SPIRIT INDWELLS...

CHAPTER FOUR -- THE SPIRIT INDWELLS THE SAINT

"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" The animated surprise of the apostle in the above text was due, not to lack of intellectual awareness, but to absence of experiential assurance. It was not theoretical ignorance which concerned him; it was practical deficiency.

Second only to the matchless miracle of the incarnation of Christ is the descent of the Spirit to tabernacle in the bodily tents of saved men and women. Through the former operation, God provides the unspeakable gift of divine life; through the latter, enriching, superabundant supplies of infinite grace. To reject the Saviour results in catastrophic hopelessness; to disregard the Spirit issues in colossal failure. In a parabolic explanation of human reactions to divine agents, the Lord Jesus related how a proprietor leased his vineyard. When the vintage time approached, the owner sought his share. The leasees took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned the third. Others were sent and received like treatment. Finally he sent his son. They said, "Come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance" (Matthew 21:38). This was pictorially true of the prophets who were stoned and beaten and sawed asunder, and of the Father’s own Son who was nailed by wicked hands to the cruel cross.

We assure ourselves we never would have participated in such evil deeds. The very thought is repulsive. Yet, if it could be proved that our treatment of the Holy Spirit falls into the same category, would it not be a serious indictment?

What, precisely, is the practical importance of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling the saint? Much in many ways, but chiefly, (1) in that He takes objective Truth and makes it an inward reality (see chap. 6). He guides into all Truth.

(2) He promotes the believer at the Throne of Grace in prayer (see chap. 10). "He maketh intercession for us."

(3) He affirms the believers relationship to the Father (see chap. 7). He witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God.

(4) He exalts the Son of God through the believer.

(5) He establishes a divine partnership with the child of God.

It is with these last two points we wish to deal in this chapter. The Exaltation of Christ The Holy Spirit came, not to speak of Himself (John 16:13), but to take the things of Christ and make them plain to us. He desires to exalt Christ. This can only be accomplished through the believer in whom He dwells. Therefore, the believer may either help or hinder this desire of the Spirit. Lauding and extolling the Most High are indications of spiritual health and wholesomeness. But since it is "God [the Spirit] which worketh in you [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure," no one who fails

to recognize and co-operate with the indwelling Spirit will experience either the inclination for or the engagement in exalting Christ.

What is meant by the exaltation of Christ from the human point of view? It is that state or quality in the believer which willingly and wholeheartedly ascribes to the Lord His rightful place in the daily life as regards adoration, authority and acknowledged accomplishment. To exalt Christ is to reveal adoration in our attitudes.

Love has a language all its own. It need not be vocal to be vital. Indeed there may be expression without experience. One may sing lustily, "My Jesus, I love Thee;

I know Thou art mine," without the least stirring of the deeper emotions. Perhaps this is but one illustration of the "vain repetition of words" against which the Saviour warned (Matthew 6:7). It is ever inspiring to hear people sing, "Love the world through me, Lord!" but this hymn of prayer will fall short of fulfillment unless we allow the Spirit to love Christ through us. Love not only begets love, but He who is love longs for affection. Surely the Holy Spirit strives to impress this fact upon our spirits, waiting as the Royal Resident within to encourage the flow of our changeless affection toward the heart that bled and broke for us. To exalt Christ is to respect His authority for our actions.

What is servant obedience but humble, volitional resignation to the sovereign Voice. It is a sweet blending of our confidence, trustfulness and assurance, respectfully, in His claims, directions and wisdom. It is the suing of the soul for that coveted status of a good man whose "steps . . . are ordered by the Lord" (Psalms 37:23).

Respecting the authority of Christ is giving precedence and transcendence to His holy will.

It is our attestation to the Tightness of His way and our confession that it is the only way for us.

It is the joy of knowing that we are under omniscient direction, hence being advanced in the proper course.

It involves a forfeiture of all personal preference and a refusal of all contrapersuasion, giving the Lord absolute priority in the life.

Without the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, indifference, obstinacy and rebellion would, in varying degrees, begin to characterize the actions of God’s people. Indeed, this is the current tendency because the Spirit of God is not recognized as the Indweller by so many professing Christians. To exalt Christ is to revel in the acknowledgment of His accomplishments.

One of the highest notes which Moses struck in his song of victory was: "I will sing unto the Lord for he hath triumphed gloriously" (Exodus 15:1). No room here for self-glorification, no basis for boasting. In fact, there was no disposition to indulge in either. It was by no clever military maneuver that the Israelites escaped by the skin of their teeth. It was not human ingenuity that opened the channel through the sea. It was not the prowess of man which wrought the decisive defeat of this preponderant foe. No, the triumph was the Lord’s. Moses extolled the Most High for what He had done. He said, "I will exalt the Lord."

Only the Holy Spirit can give us the right perspective.

Only the Holy Spirit can stimulate the heart of man to praise Him who alone is worthy.

Only He can help us to celebrate the name of our mighty Conqueror.

It was not our moral development which brought us salvation. It was not our excellent training which effected the new birth. It was not our careful deportment which wrote our names in the Lamb's Book of Life. It was not our beneficent character or our philanthropic deeds which made us heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

No, prefigured by the plight of the Israelites, we were hemmed in, cut off and doomed. Then the strong One intervened. When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for us. It was His triumph. He won the fight; He defeated the foe; He planted our feet on victory ground. The Holy Spirit is ever desirous of helping us to revel in our Lord's accomplishments. The question is, Do we exalt the Lord? We cannot without the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Partnership with the Spirit.

God uses men to fulfill His purposes. He has heavenly hosts innumerable, but He uses men.

He could speak and the world-creating force of His voice would cause men everywhere to fall tremblingly at His feet, but He uses men.

He could display in the twinkling of an eye sufficient power to transform every hardened sinner, but He uses men.

He could send legions of scintillating angels to demonstrate the brightness of His glory, but He chooses and empowers men to declare the greatness of His grace.

The blueprints of Omniscience call for the Spirit of God to work through quickened mortals who have found His favor through faith. The partnership with the Spirit is suggested. In the generally used benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:13, the statement, "and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all," supplies us with a delightful thought. The word translated "communion" is recorded as "partners" in Luke 5:10 : "James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon." It is given also as "fellowship" and as "sharers with." Thus, we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit in a practical way. We are sharers with Him in the dissemination of the Word of Life; we are partners in the work of the Lord. The partnership with the Spirit is stated. The reason Paul could not speak to the Corinthian believers as unto spiritual was due to the fact that they were not spiritual (1 Corinthians 3:1). They maintained the stature of "babes in Christ." Babes neither recognize nor assume responsibility. Thus, it requires something of an object lesson to teach the matter at hand-an illustrative approach consisting of a tiller, an irrigator and a harvester. Then the apostle came to the point: "For we are laborers together with God."

We are linked with the Infinite God in a practical procedure, and, of course, the Holy Spirit is the One in view. He is the Lord of the harvest. He directs the operations. It is incumbent upon us to submit willingly to His directions. Any indifference is an offense to Deity and grievous to the divine Administrator. The partnership with the Holy Spirit is essential. In its simplest form a partnership is said to exist when two persons offer their resources to accomplish a particular end, that together they may be equipped for the pursuance of a common purpose. But what have we which the Holy Spirit does not have? We do not have the knowledge, the wisdom, the power. Then, what do we

have which He does not possess and which He requires? A body. He has no earthly body, such as was prepared for the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 10:5). He has no feet to carry the message of redeeming love to lost men, no lips to deliver the sweetest invitation Heaven can offer, no hand to place tenderly upon the shoulder of a weary sinner.

Thus, the Holy Spirit wants your body; indeed, must have it if He is to translate hopeless ones from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. This is why Paul pleaded: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

One thought ought to register in our minds indelibly. The Holy Spirit is nonetheless God than was the precious Saviour of men. Even as the Lord Jesus was intent upon doing the will of the Father and of finishing the work, just so the blessed Holy Spirit is desirous of pursuing His ministry to its fruition, but He must have men! He must have dedicated men, active men, faithful men. The Christian is in a partnership with the Holy Spirit.

05.05- CHAPTER FIVE -- THE SPIRIT WORKS...

CHAPTER FIVE -- THE SPIRIT WORKS IN PEOPLE

"It is God which worketh in you." In order to apply the merits of the Saviour's work on the cross, the Spirit takes up His abode in the believer. This, then, may be termed the domain of the Spirit-"in you," that is, in the Christian. Where Is God? The taunting oppressors prodded the psalmist daily with the question, "Where is thy God?" (Psalms 42:10). At a later date, eastern scientists journeyed westward with the inquiry, "Where is he?" (Matthew 2:2). In answer to the former question, David said: "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven" (Psalms 11:4). For the latter, the Angel of the Lord furnished this information: "They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). If, in our day, it be asked where God is, a Christian may unhesitatingly reply, "God is in me." This is where He is, and this is where He works.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Php 2:13). This important statement will yield much light if we will but subject it to four simple questions.

(1) Who works?

(2) Where?

(3) How?

(4) Why? The Revealing Identification Who works?

"It is God which worketh." Nothing is clearer in Scripture than the fact that God is the operator in spiritual accomplishments. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalms 127:1). The Lord made an inspection of men's work and reported, "Their webs shall not become garments" (Isaiah 59:6).

Man builds dynasties which disintegrate, civilizations which crumble, principalities which perish.

Man's wisdom weakens his judgment; his ingenuity inflates his ego; his inventions threaten his ruin.

Men are more imaginative, but less manageable; more cultured, but more corrupt.

"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me" (Isaiah 30:1). God with His wisdom and power must work to insure success and permanence in any enterprise. As the "goings forth" of the Saviour have been from everlasting (Micah 5:2), even so have been the activities of the Spirit.

He was prominent in the creation of the world: "The spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

He was the promoting force in the construction of Solomon’s great house of worship: "The pattern . . . he had by the Spirit" (1 Chronicles 28:12).

He is the power in producing the temple of God which is made of living stones: "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

It is He who works in the believer. The Realm of Operation Where does God work?

"It is God which worketh in you." Of course, this is God the Holy Spirit. He is in the believer, and this is where He works. Since out of the heart, out of the innermost being, are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23), this is the logical province for His operation.

He originates, motivates and consummates. When we substitute will power for His working, we automatically place ourselves at a disadvantage. Failure becomes inevitable. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). What an abundance of testimony can be adduced to bolster this fact! A man like Napoleon could defeat great armies, but could not control his own wicked cravings which eventually wrought his downfall. The Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer must be allowed to perform His work. Then the fruit of the Spirit will be evident. "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22-23) will abound. He may find it necessary at times to do some pruning (disciplining), but this is ever "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). This yields "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11). The Procedure of the Spirit How does God work?

"To will and to do." It is at once apparent that the Holy Spirit originates the desire as well as operates in the realization of it. He deals with our attitudes as well as with our actions. These infinitives, "to will" and "to do," are the Siamese twins of spiritual success.

"To will." No one will do God’s will who does not desire God’s way. "If any man will do his will," Jesus revealed, "he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). Desire leads to knowledge, and knowledge leads to activity. Lack of fruitful activity is attributable then to lack of desire. It is unmistakably clear that, if unhindered, the Holy Spirit will create the desire which is the hunger and thirst for righteousness. He will give one the desire to forgive, to pray, to study, to witness, to love.

"To do." We must face the fact, if ever so reluctantly, that the work of the church lags. We must agree that the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish more than is being realized. It must also be emphasized that the Spirit of God never lacks purpose or power. The fault lies squarely and undeniably with the unyieldedness of those whom He indwells. As long as we initiate programs in the energy of the flesh, just that long we will remain unproductive. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63).

Why do we not understand that the Spirit of God works to give a holy desire to our hearts and a wholesome task to our hands? The Purpose of Divine Operation Why does God work within us?

"To do of his good pleasure." But what is His good pleasure? Our selfish hearts dictate and demand self-satisfaction so much that we may grievously overlook the pleasure of God.

We read that it pleased God to bruise His Son (Isaiah 53:10). This was to give us life.

In the same verse we read: "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." This is to give us life more abundant.

Further: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). This is to give life with a glorious prospect.

The above, though but a brief allusion to an infinite provision, has to do with God’s pleasure in giving to us.

There is another side-His pleasure in receiving from us.

He desires our love: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Luke 10:27).

He desires our devotion: "Set your affection on things above" (Colossians 3:2).

He wants our obedience: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1).

This whole practical matter is summarized in His own revelation in Jeremiah 9:24 : "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, said the Lord."

If the Holy Spirit were allowed to perform His work in us, we would put off the old man with all his deeds; we would put on the new man; we would draw near to God and God would draw near to us (James 4:8). The atmosphere would change; the church would flourish; the Devil would be put to flight. Heaven would come down our souls to greet and glory would crown the Mercy Seat.

"It is God [the Holy Spirit] which worketh in you."

05.06- CHAPTER SIX -- THE SPIRIT GUIDES...

CHAPTER SIX -- THE SPIRIT GUIDES THE BELIEVER

"He will guide you into all truth."

The holy spirit came to transmit and translate divine Truth. He searches the deep things of God where wisdom is absolute. His work as the Guide is to direct the mind of destitute man into the decrees of God. The Source and Soundness of Truth No one can experience the spiritual impact of Scripture or enjoy its life-giving qualities until the divine Teacher introduces one to its unfathomable depths and incalculable worth. It is, therefore, the contact of God’s Spirit with man’s which paves the way for an intelligent appreciation and an effectual appropriation of the abiding Word which has come down from above. It behooves man to grant Him the opportunity. But how is this ministration accomplished by the Spirit of God?

First of all, He corroborates the authority, the authorship and the advantages of the Bible. He declares: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Thus, He emphasizes its uniqueness, its utility and its completeness. He moved upon the men who recorded it; He moves within the men who receive it. The Search of the Student

We have not only the Spirit’s commendation of the soundness of Truth, but His command for the study of the text: "Study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15). And there is indication of an examination to follow: "The word that I have spoken," Jesus warned, "the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Jesus also said: "Search the scriptures . . . they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). The student is the searcher. To search is to study. To study means to "delve into" with the purpose of grasping, of knowing. Of the writing of books there is no end. The pen of man has produced an almost interminable expression:

of his impressions of Me in all its intricacies,

of nature in all its exquisiteness,

of creeds in their distinguishing diversities,

of philosophy in its studied deductions,

of science in its manifold technicalities,

of moral principles in their several fields,

of behavior in its displayed variations,

of facts and fancies in every conceivable form.

But the Book of God transcends all. It is to be desired above all. The Focus of divine revelation God wrote only one Book of which we have knowledge. He took for His theme the Person of His

only begotten Son. In this Book He:

extols His virtues,

unfolds His perfections,

reveals His accomplishments,

presents His claims.

Here is the divine summation, "Christ is all"! (Colossians 3:11). That is:

He is the sum total of all worthfulness.

He is the sum total of all loveliness, for "he is altogether lovely."

He is the sum total of all power, for "all power in heaven and earth is given unto him."

He is the sum total of all peace, for "he is our peace . . . having made peace by the blood of his cross."

He is the sum total of salvation, for "neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

From the first book of the Bible, in which Christ is the seed of the woman, to the last book in which He is exalted on the throne, Christ is all!

He is all in creation, for "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3).

He is all in life, for He "is our life" (Colossians 3:4).

He is all in knowledge, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

He is all in strength, for "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Php 4:13).

He is all in joy, for "whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

He is all in comfort, for He promised, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18).

He is all in hope, for "Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

He is all in everlasting pleasure, for at His right hand "there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalms 16:11).

This is something of the green pastures into which the Spirit leads the willing, believing heart and mind. Search the Scriptures! The Way-pointer The Holy Spirit points out the way. "He will guide you into all truth."

He is the One who knows the way-the Conductor. A guide is necessary when the way is not known, or when immensity or complexity (or both) characterizes the objective to be surveyed. And

where can the human mind discover a broader, more profound field of investigation? The Book of books is a mine of wealth incomputable, an ocean of wisdom unfathomable, and a sphere of wonder incomparable. The life it gives; the light it shares; the love it reveals-all challenge the heart with an overwhelming sense of blessedness.

Because the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God, and is Himself omniscient, this gracious Guide can direct us into the highways of prophecy, into the boulevards of doctrine, into the avenues of inspiration, and into the bypaths of biography. The follower has the unsurpassed privilege of ascending the mountain-climbs to view panoramas of revealed grandeur. With His assistance, the hungry eat of the manna of Heaven and the thirsty drink of the water of life. He knows where the table is set; He knows where the crystal water flows. Until He leads, we are not led. We stand abjectly in the midst of our pitiful destitution on the outside of the rich territory of Truth. The Facilitated Perception. The Guide who furnishes direction into the realms of Revelation also provides ability for its appreciation and appropriation.

"The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you" (1 John 2:27).

What is this perpetual possession which the believer has received? It is the "anointing of the spirit" -a holy endowment to furnish one with qualities to grasp the Truth, the faculties which facilitate an appropriation of Scripture. In fact, the anointing is the Spirit Himself. Therefore, no excuse exists for lack of Bible knowledge. With the ability invested, and the availability evident, and the Author present, just the reach of desire is required. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17).

Willingness is the prerequisite;

Concentration is the procedure;

Enlightenment is the product.

There is a quickening, constraining, commanding force to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit desires to bring us into the pervasive refreshment and the practical potency of its living qualities.

Many seem passively content with just a smattering of Truth, just a vague idea of what the Bible teaches. This is an affront to the Holy Spirit; indeed, a rejection of His purpose and plan. He, upon whom we are dependent for knowledge, says in effect: "Come, I will take you to the storehouse where you will find treasures both new and old" (Matthew 13:52). He leads into all Truth -into every part of the Holy Scriptures. The Prerequisite to Discernment The Bible is "spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The language of Heaven must be translated to the human heart.

Without the Holy Spirit’s enablement:

we may see its words but miss its wonders;

we may glimpse its statements, without grasping its substance;

we may notice its grammar without noting its greatness;

we may peruse its paragraphs without possessing its power.

We should desire more than its grammatical and theoretical aspects, its narratives and its moral precepts. His words are spirit and His words are life (John 6:63). Until we see this fact, we do not have clear perception.

Since the "natural man" cannot receive the things of God, then regeneration or the new birth must be experienced as the first requirement for perception. Then the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be welcomed, else our eyes will remain unopened; our minds will be unaffected; our hearts will continue unstirred; and our feet will not be led, allowing us to drift like a ship without a rudder and float with the current of our own imperfect impressions and desires. The Reality of Enriching Truth When the Lord Jesus opened the understanding of the Emmaus sojourners (Luke 24:45), perhaps He was giving a preview of this enlightening ministry of the Spirit. Only hallowed illumination dissipates the darkness of ignorance. "The entrance of thy [its] words giveth light" (Psalms 119:130). If His Word gains entrance, it will give light. That is its inherent nature and its designed agency. With the psalmist, this discovery was learned only after his personal petition for it.

"Open thou mine eyes," he pleaded earlier, "that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalms 119:18). Desire precedes experience. The Spirit waits to make the properties of His glorious truth the possession of each heart-the glad reality of an enriched soul. Do you not desire to submit yourself to the leadership of this faithful Guide? Do you not want to know the Truth as He teaches it, as God intended it to be known? He will erase all the fingerprints of preconceived ideas from the showcase of Holy Writ, allowing its oracles to shine forth in all their exactness and intended clarity. No one is so well taught as the one who is Spirit taught. He provides the facilities; He promotes the understanding; He guides into all truth.

05.07- CHAPTER SEVEN -- THE SPIRIT GIVES...

CHAPTER SEVEN -- THE SPIRIT GIVES ASSURANCE

"The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit."

How may we know that we are vitally related to the Infinite God? The answer is, "The Spirit itself [himself] beareth witness with our spirit" (Romans 8:16).

Blind unbelief and careless inattention to Truth will complicate this Heaven-sent assurance. A great variety of emotional displays have been advanced in personal testimony as to its meaning. Bright lights and glowing visions have been mentioned as the experience of those who have "received the witness." The excited earnestness on the part of those who make such statements is not to be made light of. On the other hand, the inaccuracy of their claims should not confuse us.

There are those, be they ever so conscientious, who erroneously divide God’s people into two classes-those who have received the witness and those who have not. The Witness of the Spirit

It must be remembered that the Holy Spirit is the witness. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1 John 5:10). Thus, everyone who receives the Son of God has the Witness. The paramount difficulty lies in the fact of man’s understanding or misunderstanding as to what the Witness does when He witnesses. What is the witness of the Spirit? Simply what the text states.

He witnesses with the believer’s spirit that he is a child of God.

Whether we understand it or not, He pursues this ministry.

Whether we appreciate it or not, He performs it.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, He promotes it.

"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). His is an unchangeable faithfulness. To witness, according to the simplest definition, is to attest the truth of a person, place, or thing. The Greek word in this instance means "to witness with."

Thus, the Holy Spirit takes up His abode within the believer to witness with his spirit. We cannot see our Father, but we know we are His children because of the witnessing of His Spirit with our spirit that this relation exists. If you ask how He witnesses, then we must throw up our hands and exclaim with Paul: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

We cannot explain the operations and actions of God. How inscrutable are His movements! How untraceable His footsteps! Let us observe the practical value of this ministry. In Times of Discouragement Discouragement, a chief stratagem of Satan, is the thief of joy.

It erases the radiance from the countenance.

It eclipses the light a believer is commanded to let shine.

It drapes disappointment and drabness about a would-be victor.

Jesus knew that Peter was going to face a great trial, so He said to him assuringly: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:32). He knew, as well, what trials we all would meet. Thus, He said: "It is to your advantage that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7). The advantage of the Spirit's presence when discouragement settles itself over the life of a believer is incalculable. He is the antidote for frustration, disappointment and perplexity. His witness with our spirit that we are the children of God can, as nothing else, lift the drooping spirit. In the Hour of Temptation

There are times when Satan nibbles at our faith by putting some alluring proposition before our minds. The blessed Indweller stands guard for just such an emergency. He bids us commit our case to Him. He can outwit Satan. We cannot. Besides, it is His battle and not ours (2 Chronicles 20:15). And when the pitfalls are digged and the collaborating cohorts of the evil one seek subtly to entice, then the Spirit will witness with our spirit, "Thou art a child of God." Is this not sufficient?

Such a reminder should be enough:

to enable one to detect the danger,

to detest the temptation

to depart from the tempter.

This undergirding support is our constant blessing through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Surely the Christian cannot meet temptation without the loving hand of the Father being extended to help. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). What is the way of escape? Is it not the knowledge that we are His? This should dictate the voice we obey. In the Day of Sorrow And what about sorrow? Are we left alone to trudge through the deep waters of grief which threaten so often to engulf us? "It is expedient for you that I go away," Jesus reminds. It has become especially advantageous in sorrow.

Lazarus had died. Mary and Martha were in the throes of bereavement. One of the first utterances from the lips of Martha when Jesus came was, "If thou hadst been here." You see what Jesus meant about the advantage of having the Holy Spirit with one all the time. When sorrow strikes with its cold, devastating blow to break hearts, God the Spirit is there with the Christian.

He sees every falling tear;

He knows every heartache.

What does He do? The text tells us. He witnesses with the spirit of the believer that he is a child of God. God is the "God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). He can soothe the heartache, calm the troubled breast, and support the weakened soul. This means that there is no cause to sorrow as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). This means that no matter the thorn in the flesh, His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). Thus, whenever sorrow strikes, however strong its blow, the Comforter is doing His work. We are never beyond the reach of the Spirit. For Every

Emergency The presence and witness of the Holy Spirit are essential in every condition of life.

In discouragement, He says, "Be of good cheer."

In perplexity, He says, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

In the exuberance of youth, He says, "Remember thy creator" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

In old age, He says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

In service, He says, "Lo, I am with you alway" (Matthew 28:20).

In supplication, He says, "I will answer thee."

In devotion, He says, "Son, give me thine heart."

In giving, He says: "Prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10).

In faintness, He says, "I will uphold thee by the right hand of my might."

Amid burdens, He says, "Casting all your care upon him" (1 Peter 5:7).

In weariness He says, "I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The Corroborated Assurance

Whether in prosperity or poverty, in sickness or health, in sadness or gladness, in pleasure or pain, the Holy Spirit is faithfully performing His witness with the spirit of the child of God. He will under no circumstance leave us in the lurch.

05.08- CHAPTER EIGHT -- THE SPIRIT PROVIDES...

CHAPTER EIGHT -- THE SPIRIT PROVIDES POWER

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."

What a stinging, stunning blow herein is dealt the ego of man! In language singular and sublime, yet simple and solemn, it is settled once and for all that spiritual accomplishments are dependent not upon the might of man but rather upon the dynamic of Deity. The Might of David What may be said of one who is filled with the Spirit?

Simply this:

He is one who walks like a wise man amid the folly of a self-reliant age.

He is one who moves like a victor against vicious opposition.

He is one who stands resolutely on the side of godliness.

The Who’s Who of ancient days listed King Saul as one who stood head and shoulders above all in Israel. His armies were impressive to view and their equipment excellent for the day, but they trembled at the sight of the Philistine. David, by contrast, marched forthwith to a decisive victory over the taunting, terrifying Goliath without assisting forces or blaring fanfare. Saul was bulwarked with human might and power, but failed; David was clothed with the Spirit as he advanced in the name of the Lord, and succeeded. The Case of Stephen

There was Stephen who stood on the threshold of a new era and decried without restraint the empty traditions of men which counteracted the message of hope. The account is reported from two viewpoints; namely, the human and divine.

Men said: "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law" (Acts 6:13).

God said: "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8). The discrepancy in these reports is at once revealing. "All that sat in council" (Acts 6:15) came up with the same decision.

They were unanimous (Acts 7:57).

They gnashed upon him with their teeth.

They stopped their ears.

They ran upon him.

They cast him out of the city.

They stoned him.

They resented his words.

They resisted his works.

They rejected his Saviour.

Thus, Stephen became the first recorded example of one emulating the words of the Lord Jesus: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). This man's soul could not be killed. His spirit could not be broken. As his body collapsed under the punishing attack of his persecutors, his faith, forgiveness and fearlessness caused Heaven to smile with approbation. At the same time, Christianity's greatest advocate-to-be was being impressed with a demonstration of supernatural power manifested in a human life.

Saul of Tarsus stood by.

What was the secret of this phenomenal death? There was no secret! The explanation is an open letter to be read and known by all men. He had not been famous in the sight of men. He left no fortune of gold and silver, of stocks and bonds, of real estate and possessions. The fact which is monumental to the memory of Stephen is that he was "full . . . of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5). This was his supporting power, even in martyrdom. The Spirit Versus Satan The early church faced severe tests of faith.

There were problems within as well as pressure without, and dealing with internal matters is usually the more trying. Enemy soldiers are more recognizable on the field than are enemy saboteurs in the factory, and more easily disposed of. All subversive agents are dedicated to destructive enterprises. Their design is to weaken the internal structure. The overall pattern is essentially the same whether in the political, economic, moral or spiritual realms. The church, with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, alarms Satan. He energized Herod to plot the destruction of the Babe of Bethlehem. He later employed diverse artifices to ensnare the Son of God and to controvert His message. His stratagems were multiple at Calvary, but when the phenomenal tongues of fire and rushing wind bespoke the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, Satan was little prepared to do more than produce a few mockers (Acts 2:13). Soon, however, he feverishly deployed his forces and organized opposition became evident.

He faced Jesus in person in the wilderness temptation and failed. Later, he faced the Spirit indwelling Peter and fell.

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were evidently prominent people in the assembly. (Subversion succeeds more effectively where there is position, prestige or popularity.) They pretended to be "in fellowship," to be co-operative, but they withheld part of the sale price of their property. Of course, there was no legitimate reason why they should not have retained the total amount for themselves, but for the fact that they had promised it all and pretended to have so given.

Here is the divine record on the matter: Peter, specially commissioned by his resurrected Lord, was "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 4:31). Ananias entered the assembly filled with Satan. The peace and wholesomeness of the fellowship were thereby threatened. Discerning Peter withstood him.

"Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?" the great apostle demanded firmly. That day, the two greatest of all powers were arrayed one against the other. One had to go down. One did go down!

"Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God"! thundered the old veteran of the faith.

Ananias, hearing these words, "fell down, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 5:5). It was the victory of the Holy Spirit.

Faith and the Flogging Post An unprincipled mob ruthlessly prodded a humble man to a place of penal striping. Lashed to the post as though he were a cruel monster of vicious intent, the executioner administered the stripes. As the whip fell with no lessened force or fierceness for the thirty-ninth time, one wonders how the system of a mortal could endure such unspeakable infliction. Not once, but twice; then the third time the penalty was imposed. On still another occasion, the persecutors resorted to rods with their bone-bruising impact. At yet another instance, they took up stones against the man of little stature but of great faith. Perils, painfulness and poverty multiplied. In the midst of such intense maltreatment and bodily discomfort, this stalwart, battle-worn and scarred servant quietly prays: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

He had discovered:

a possessing power,

a sustaining force,

a persevering energy.

It was the dynamic of Deity, the power of Christ resident within through the Spirit. It was the stabilizing factor in all the triumphant testifiers of Truth who willingly hazarded their lives for the cause of Christ. It enabled the martyrs to defy the frailties of the flesh as the flaming fagots burned their skin and sizzled the blood from their veins. This is the supreme might imparted by the Spirit (cf. Php 4:13). The Fetters of State Control With the spirit of feudalism rampant, the feeling of clanship fervent, the brutality of the aristocracy rough, the ignorance and profligacy of the clergy disheartening, the spiritual cast in Scotland was most confusing in the mid-sixteenth century. The state-controlled church left little alternative to the dissatisfied and despairing people. Then Knox, though previously exiled for his dissenting boldness, dared to oppose the use of the English Prayer Book. In 1555, he preached with great effect in different parts of the British Isles, "thundering against idolatry, and the people responded by breaking in pieces the images of the saints and pulling down the monasteries. He denounced the mass as the worship of a false god." (History of Christian Church by Fisher). The kings and the queens had at their disposal both might and power, but the Lord spoke by His Spirit through Knox who was willing to wield, not carnal weapons, but the Sword of the Spirit which is mighty under God to the dismantling of strongholds.

Contemporary Systems

We witness in our day stupendous attempts to operate in the spiritual realm through humanly mobilized might and organized power.

Church councils spread out from boundary to boundary in a nation, and then join hands in a world-wide amalgamation. From a centralized office, a few men or even a lone individual may sign documents of far-reaching significance or speak concerning a policy, purporting to represent the "strength" of many millions. When God wants to shake the dominion of Satan, however, He noticeably bypasses these colossal machines and moves upon a man. It may be a Finney or a Moody, a Judson or a Taylor, but God energizes a man instead of organizing a movement; and what an organization of global proportions could never accomplish with its boasted might and power, God can do through a Spirit-filled man who is propelled by the dynamic of Deity. The Potency of the Spirit As the resurrected Christ gathered His little group of servants about Him before His glorious ascension, He made it clear that they would need power as they went out against the forces of wickedness. He knew of what that power would consist. He knew what it would accomplish.

Power to preach convincingly.

Dear old lovable Peter, unschooled in logic, exegesis and public speaking, found power to drive the message of the Gospel to the very core of three thousand at one time. The cultured Corinthians charged that Paul’s bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible, but they acknowledged with honest confession that his message was weighty (2 Corinthians 10:10). If he were not handsome in appearance, he could not help it. If his voice lacked resonance, that too was beyond his control. But it would have been inexcusable with a revelation from Heaven (1 Corinthians 11:23) and the Spirit of power within had he delivered anything but a weighty message.

Physical deficiencies of the messenger will fade into nothingness if the message is one of life and power. If we believe "an ounce of divine revelation is worth more than tons of men’s empty speculations," then let us present Heaven’s message with vision and vigor. God’s words are spirit, and His words are life (John 6:63).

Hearts are hungry for this food;

Souls are thirsty for this water.

Indeed, they will perish without it. Let us herald the message in the demonstration of power.

Power to submerge differences.

"And all that believed were together, and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).

People differ in temperament and, therefore, reflect varying reactions. But something had actually homogenized hearts. There was an impressive unity. They volunteered to share and share alike in all things. Love abounded. Sympathy flowed. There was a new relationship. There was a changed atmosphere. This was not a Utopian dream come true. They could not have previously conceived it. The fire of the Holy Spirit had welded souls together in a tie that binds hearts in Christian love. They found no points over which to argue, no dogmas to dispute, no liturgical procedures to divide them. Old things had passed away, and now all things had become new. How sorely the church of Jesus Christ today needs a baptism of this power!

Power to evangelize.

"Neither is there salvation in any other"; Peter emphasized, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The atmosphere was not congenial. There were no praying saints. He faced the cold, stoic, reactionary leaders of a decadent Judaism. There was a mortuary cast about the courtroom, a bitterness in the air. His life was in jeopardy. But the prisoner preached. He pressed home to their hearts the claims of Christ as the Spirit gave him utterance.

Power to withstand opposition.

Peter stood before the Sanhedrin. Perhaps it was Annas himself who put the question in solemn tones to the Gospel preacher as the members of the august body looked on with disdain.

"By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" the high priest demanded.

Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, answered: "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole" (Acts 4:8; Acts 4:10). The power of the Spirit has given a firm stability and a wholesome steadiness to all those who have drawn upon its inexhaustible store.

With it, Paul withstood Felix and Agrippa.

With it, Titus overcame the heretics of Crete.

With it, Timothy became a good soldier of Jesus Christ:

Lord, as of old, at Pentecost Thou didst Thy power display; With cleansing, purifying flame, Descend on us today!

05.09- CHAPTER NINE -- SPIRIT FLOWS THROUGH...

CHAPTER NINE -- SPIRIT FLOWS THROUGH HEARTS

"This spake he of the Spirit."

IT WAS THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES. JESUS WAS teaching in the temple. On the last day of convocation, He cried out: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). These words constitute an explanation, an invitation and a satisfaction. They deal with faith, fact and a flow. The details plainly in view lay the whole picture clearly before us. We note the surrounding crowd, the Saviour's concern and the sudden cry. The Explanation of Christ The Faith.

"He that believeth on me." Perhaps one of the simplest definitions of a Christian is, "One who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and keeps on believing." Most of us are willing to trust Him for forgiveness but unwilling to trust Him for fruitfulness. However, there must be a continuing trust, a constant dependence. We leaned upon Him yesterday for deliverance; we must look to Him today for promotion. We received Him for salvation; we must now resign ourselves to Him for service. Yesterday's faith will not win today's battles. The manna was fresh each day for the children of Israel in the wilderness. Likewise, daily benefits from above (James 1:17) are the heritage of God's people today. To keep on believing Christ, to rest continually upon His promises, enables us to derive from Him life in its promised abundance. It may be gradual in its manifestation. Indeed, it is the nature of growth to be gradual. But we must keep on believing if we are to continue in Christian development. The Basis of Belief The Fact.

"As the scripture hath said."

Faith must be anchored as well as channeled. It must hold to something as well as reach for something. If faith is not attached to fact, it has no anchor. If it has no anchor, then it cannot reach out to grasp reality. Hence, the explanation that what He was promising was unalterably contingent upon a scriptural belief in Him.

These whom He addressed were religious but ignorant of the revealed plan and purpose of God!

They waved their branches;

They recited their ritual;

They camped in their tents.

They tried to keep the Law;

But they did not trust in the Lord.

They made a great display of effort, but were destitute of assurance. They had everything but satisfaction. After all the Law and the Prophets said concerning the Messiah-Redeemer, after all that had been recorded in the Psalms about Him, He was unrecognized when He came-and unwanted. The Invitation and Objection

It must be remembered that the cry of our Lord in this critical moment of Israel’s blindness was of more than passing importance. It was an announcement of spiritual blessings soon to abound. It was addressed to all who thirst. It presented a promise of refreshing satisfaction in marked contrast to the formal, ritualistic, unsatisfying religion displayed all about Him.

It impressed some favorably, others adversely.

Some said, "Of a truth, this is the Prophet" (John 7:40).

Others said, "This is the Christ" (John 7:41).

Still others, perhaps the majority, were dubious.

The chief priests and Pharisees said that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet (John 7:41-42). Such are the varying reactions to the Word of the Lord. And the conceptions concerning a Spirit-filled life are today just as divergent and confusing. It is not one single act of the Spirit; it is rather a continuous operation. It is not one fantastic flood; it is a faithful flow. The Promise of the Spirit The Flow "Out of his [innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water." This was not an enigma. It was figurative language, to be sure, but at once it was given an application. "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John 7:39).

This dissipates all mystery of terminology.

This designates an inward ministry.

This denotes an outward manifestation.

It is evidential Christianity, the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit in the trusting saint. The word "flow" means what the humblest person understands it to mean. As water flows when unhindered, even so will the Spirit of life. There will be an increasing, multiple manifestation of Christlike characteristics attending one’s growth in grace:

the sweetness of humility,

the constancy of faithfulness,

the joy of fruitfulness,

the effectuality of prayer,

the tenderness of compassion.

The Waters of the Word The subject of His promise is living water.

"Deep waters" speak of problems: "I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me" (Psalms 69:2).

"Still waters" speak of peace: "He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalms 23:2).

"Mighty waters" speak of pretense: "Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! . . . They shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind" (Isaiah 17:12-13).

"Many waters" speak of perplexity: "Therefore will not we fear . . . Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled" (Psalms 46:2),

"Living waters" speak of life: "Out of his [innermost being] shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38).

The Power of the Spirit

Climaxing His invitation-a compounded appeal to a lost world-the Lord says: "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). The living water, then, is the water of life; and the water of life is in the Son of God (1 John 5:12). This new life which one has by believing in Christ is given of, sustained by, and energized through the Holy Spirit. As the Christian continues to believe on Christ, continues to take Him at His Word in careful obedience, the Spirit increasingly evidences through that believer the very life which He is nurturing, cultivating and developing. The Lord Jesus did not promise merely a trickle or a trace of Holy Spirit manifestation in the life of one who is constant in his trust, but rather rivers of living water. The word rivers speaks of an impressive abundance. If there is the right kind of believing, this will be the actual result. Jesus Christ cannot lie, If there is not the flow of spiritual characteristics from our innermost being, then there is not the right kind of believing. There is no other conclusion to be found. If there is not a flow, there must be hindrances. What are they? The Sin of Obstructing the Flow

Resisting.

Stephen was candid in his denunciation of the council before whom he was arraigned. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost," he charged with surprising firmness. "As your fathers did, so do ye." To resist is to oppose, to hinder, to obstruct. This does not mean that a finite creature can overpower the Infinite. What it does mean is that the economy of God is so designed that the Holy Spirit works through human instrumentality; and this is based upon willing obedience. Where there is disobedience, there is resistance. If it were a matter of forcing submission upon the Christian, the whole divine scheme of things would be distorted. There would be no honor, no reverence, no obedience, no love and, of course, no reward. One resists the Holy Spirit who objects to His plan and purpose and procedure, either by substituting some human scheme or by silently ignoring divine directions.

Quenching.

"Quench not the Spirit," Paul warned (1 Thessalonians 5:19). This has to do with suppressing His witness, of silencing His promptings, of counteracting His gracious movements upon our souls. We are told that our actions often speak so loudly that people cannot hear what we say. In some such manner, our own desires and designs assert themselves so insistently that we cannot detect the still small voice which would direct us aright.

If we only knew how sadly we clutter our lives with selfishness and worldliness and foolishness and worthlessness, we might begin to see why the flow of living water is not evident, not profuse.

Since the issues of life are from the heart (Proverbs 4:23), and since the heart is synonymous with our innermost being, how can living water flow concurrently with asserting willfulness? They do not commingle.

If we long for the fleshpots of Egypt (Exodus 16:3), the Spirit will be quenched. He will have nothing to do with such unholy and unsavory longings. If, on the other hand, we hunger and thirst for righteousness, He will assist us in our holy aspiration, and we shall be abundantly satisfied (Matthew 5:6). When our pleasure coincides with His purpose and our faith co-operates with His resurrection power, then the flow swells until it permeates the whole being and overflows for the profit and delight of others.

Blasphemy.

Blasphemy is anything of a sacrilegious nature or an irreverent character.

Things in these categories, whether words or deeds or attitudes, are definitely contrary to the very nature of the Holy Spirit.

to hold Truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18),

to harbor ill-will,

to tolerate unforgiveness,

to create dissension

are but a few of the things against which we should guard if the living water is to flow from the innermost being.

Lying to.

Only a look at Ananias and Sapphira will convince us that this offense is to be looked upon with the greatest concern. We should fear it more than the venom of a poisonous serpent. Yet how often is this offense committed! We are responsible to the Holy Spirit for our conduct and for our conversation, for our substance and for our service, for our time and for our talent. The accounting is inevitable (2 Corinthians 5:10). When we claim to be Christians, there must be compatibility between the lip and the life. There must be vital experience as well as vocal expression. The Holy Spirit desires truth in our inward parts (Psalms 51:6).

Grieving.

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" is another firm warning which we would do well to observe. And what is grief? Is it sorrow? It is more than sorrow. It is injury to love. There is no discomfort so perturbing. If we had a proper appreciation of His great love (Romans 15:30) as He indwells and patiently ministers to us and secures and sustains us, then would we begin to know how greatly we may injure that love. And grieving is not necessarily a separate offense against the Holy Spirit. It may result from any offense against Him, or from all of them. When these offenses are avoided, the Holy Spirit will flow from the innermost being. This is the promise of Christ. It is spiritual life in its richest display.

05.10- CHAPTER TEN -- THE SPIRIT OPERATES...

CHAPTER TEN -- THE SPIRIT OPERATES IN PRAYER

"The Spirit maketh intercession for us."

If the spirit’s ministry in its entirety were not essential and indispensable, we might at times think we can fare just as well without certain phases of His divine operations. This, however, could never be true of any discerning person with regard to the Spirit’s part in the sacred exercise of prayer. Our inability to pray as we ought is the paramount infirmity of our Christian experience. The Spirit Knows Our Needs No dilemma could be so disconcerting as that of being burdened and not knowing the what nor the how in seeking relief. Yet this is statedly our weakness. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Romans 8:26).

Here again, the divine Indweller comes to our rescue.

He knows whereof we have need even before we ask.

He knows the kind of need and the extent of it.

He knows the degree of urgency in having it cared for.

He knows the seriousness of neglect.

He is within to detect and to direct; to prompt and to promote.

He makes heavenly help most inviting in the midst of our helplessness.

The Spirit Knows the Way to God Our need for contacting the throne of God is continual. Hence the exhortation to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But there are times when we are more conscious of our need-times when the heart must get through to God, and that without delay. So quickly do the secular supports go from under us, that our petitions are sometimes sudden outbursts of soul anguish. When Peter saw the boisterous wind he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, "Lord, save me" (Matthew 14:30). This was a cry of desperation-a prayer of emergency. There was no time for heart preparation, no opportunity to engage in vain repetition. He had to get through to God. How readily, even intuitively, the hand of need reaches heavenward! But how futile is the reach, how disappointing the cry, when the suppliant knows not the way! Unless he knows the One who does know the way and can promote him in it, his heart finds no genuine comfort. The Spirit Knows the Will of God "He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). This revealed fact, perhaps more than any other, gives deep assurance to the earnest suppliant. It is not so much the Holy Spirit working in co-operation with us in the matter of prayer, but rather working for us. As one of the translations puts it, "He interposes Himself on our behalf." The interposition of the Godhead is a revealing consideration.

The Lord Jesus Christ interposed Himself on behalf of men when He "gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6). He took our place.

The Father interposed Himself on our behalf as a witness to the hope which is both steadfast and sure, an anchor of the soul. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Hebrews 6:17).

Says Delitzsch: "God descended, as it were, from His own absolute exaltation in order, so to speak, to look up to Himself after the manner of men and take Himself to witness; and so by a gracious condescension, confirm the promise for the sake of the inheritors." Davidson adds: "He mediated or came in between men and Himself through the oath by Himself." The Holy Spirit, knowing the will of God, operates only in accordance with that will. This should further impress us with the essentiality of a complete yieldedness to the control and guidance of the divine Indweller.

How often must the Spirit of God remind the heart of men: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts"! (James 4:3). The Spirit Intercedes "The Spirit itself [himself] maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." When we get this far in such a solemn and sacred consideration, we have plunged ourselves into the fathomless depths of divine wonders. We have moved into the unspeakable, the incomprehensible, but not into the incredible. This second part of the verse is but the progressive result of the first, and the Holy Spirit goes beyond our reach into the sublime stages of prayer operation. But He goes in our behalf; He goes to make intercession for us.

It is only our recognition of His presence and our resignation to His patient promotion which carries prayer into this inexpressible and effective status. It is as though the Holy Spirit says, "You can trust Me where you cannot trace Me." Then He carries the interests of the yielded soul before the throne of grace, there to have every need met in the sufficiency of an assured answer.

What irreparable loss we must suffer when we fail to acknowledge the presence and power of the Spirit in our lives and refuse to submit completely to His guidance! The Spirit’s Unutterable Groanings

"The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us [the saints] with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). With man a groan is a deep inarticulate sound expressing pain, grief, or disappointment. With the Spirit it is inaudible but indicative of concern.

Three times the apostle Paul referred to the groaning of the believers.

(1) "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23).

(2) "We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:2).

(3) "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened" (2 Corinthians 5:4). In these quotations we find a restlessness, a longing and an outlook. The groanings of the Holy Spirit in His intercessions for us are unutterable. He puts our burdened hearts in touch with the supply of grace, wisdom and comfort. As a colony of Heaven in this sin-scarred realm (Php 3:20) He ministers to our needs. We may be surrounded by enemies, but we are not cut off. The supply

lines cannot be broken. The term, "maketh intercession," twice repeated, carries the thought of a continual work, even as "beareth witness" (Romans 8:16) is a constant undertaking. Thus, the Holy Spirit knows our needs, understands God’s will, and interposes Himself on our behalf in prayer.

How the Spirit Promotes in Prayer "God hath sent forth the Spirit . . . crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6). This sacred salutation is found three times in the Scriptures. It is used with regard to the Saviour, once with regard to the Spirit, and once with regard to the saints. The word "Abba," which means "Father," is simply "Ab" (Awb) in the Hebrew. In the Chaldee emphatic state, it is "The Father." In the New Testament it has the Greek interpretation subjoined, and is found as "Abba, Father," or "Father, the Father." or more freely, "Father, O Father." It became the reverent title of God in prayer-the salutation of the Most High.

"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

The Spirit gives us union with God (Romans 8:9 c).

The Spirit also gives us the unction of God (1 John 2:20).

The former is the prerequisite; the latter, the power. It is a communicating power.

God looked down one day and saw His Son among men (Matthew 3:17).

God looks down today and sees His Son in men (Galatians 4:19).

As the Son addressed the Father from among men (John 17:1), even so now the Spirit speaks to the Father from within men (Galatians 4:6).

"No man can say that Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Corinthians 12:3). He is our voice, even as He is our life. Nothing Godward can originate from man. "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

"Ye have received the Spirit of adoption,, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15). The word "whereby" reveals that the born-again person is granted

the position of vital relationship to God,

the privilege of the children of the household of faith,

the possibility of communication with the Father.

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2:18). This means that the way is clear for us to come unto God. The Spirit makes the entree. He gives us the appropriate salutation. One does not move carelessly in the presence of royalty. People practice for months the correct methods and manners of meeting such. Curtsies are perfected and royal etiquette studied. Yet it is a more solemn matter to approach Deity. The Holy Spirit alone can lead us into the presence of God.

We cry and the Spirit cries, but it is His cry which registers the petition in Heaven and assures the petitioner that the contact has been made.

05.11- CHAPTER ELEVEN -- THE SPIRIT WALKS WITH...

CHAPTER ELEVEN -- THE SPIRIT WALKS WITH CHRISTIANS

"Walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."

Life must lead down some pathway. It must follow some course. When we think of the outreach of the emotions, the sporadic plunges of desires, we perhaps envision an intricate network of winding paths. In a sense, our impression is correct. Yet, the Saviour pointed out just two ways: the narrow which leads to life; the broad which leads to destruction. The Course of Progress

Walking is moving. Motion is the manifestation of life. Spiritual life is the manifestation of the Spirit, and there should be a naturalness about it. How strange should one lament, "I wish I knew how to breathe. I wish I knew how to eat. I wish I knew how to sleep. If only I knew how to grow from boyhood to manhood, from girlhood to womanhood"! Nothing is more natural than for a living creature to breathe. It is most normal for people to eat and to sleep. It is likewise in keeping with the laws of development for boys to become men and girls to become women.

Maturity Encouraged.

Why should we make spiritual life and growth to be such an insoluble enigma? The principles and conditions of growth and development are clearly stated.

We are told what the Christian should put off and put on;

We are told whom he should and should not follow;

We are told what he should desire and what he should not desire;

We are told what his associations should and should not be.

He is told:

to walk in the light,

to follow peace,

to try the spirits to see whether they be of God,

to prove that which is excellent,

to separate from evil,

to honor the Lord,

to rescue the fallen,

to comfort the sorrowing,

to help the needy,

to search the Scriptures,

to pray without ceasing,

to rejoice in the Lord,

to edify one another,

to forgive,

to assemble for worship,

to watch for God’s Son from Heaven,

to keep himself in the love of God.

Maturity Possible.

If the above, though only a partial delineation, seems complex, observe how wonderfully simple the matter has been made: "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead" (Romans 6:13).

Yieldedness is letting the Spirit of life live through us, to furnish the atmosphere of purity, to supply the Bread of Heaven, to give the rest that "remaineth for the people of God." He builds us up in that most holy faith where maturity is but the inevitable result of His work in and through us. Let us "henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness . . . grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15). The Path of Obedience

Acknowledgment of the Lordship of Christ forever settles the matter of servant obedience. This is why the apostle Paul’s life became so exemplary from the very moment of his conversion. "Lord," he said with seriousness, "what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). The Path of Fruitfulness. When the Lord issues a command, there is no alternative. To pursue a different course is a deliberate plunge toward defeat. As another has said, "There is no failure within God’s will; there can be no success without."

Jesus commanded., "Launch out; let down!" Peter replied, "We were out there, Lord. We toiled all night, only to meet with failure; nevertheless, at Thy word, I will let down the nets."

Success was that moment assured. The overwhelming proof was soon evident. The Word states that Peter "was astonished, and all that were with him" (Luke 5:9).

If our faith were but more simple, we would take Him at His Word.

This is obedience.

This is the promise of victory;

This is the assurance of success.

This is walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.

The Path of Joyfulness. The reason it is better to obey than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22) is that obedience brings joy, and spiritual joy is synonymous with the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Nothing grieves the blessed In-dweller more than disobedience. When the Holy Spirit is grieved, a state of joy is impossible. Conversely, when the Spirit is honored and obeyed, the resultant blessing may be boundless. A State of Devotion

Devotion to Christ is fixing one's affections on things above (Colossians 3:2). It is the welcome discovery that there is none in Heaven whom we have but Him, and none on earth to be desired beside Him (Psalms 73:25). The Point of Devotion. With Peter, the point of true devotion arrived in a little ship in mid-sea. It was the grandest moment in the life of the apostle. This sturdy weather-beaten fisherman, in bent posture, was broken at the knees of Jesus. His bearded, upturned face was stamped with indescribable, gripping amazement. "Leave me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8), he mumbles. He had followed and revered His Master for some two years, but then came a different perspective. Now he has witnessed something, sensed something, faced something which had never registered before. At once he became ready to leave, not only his ship as before, but all.

It was the sight of the Saviour's wounds for Thomas.

It was the voice of the resurrected Christ for Mary.

It was the temple vision for Isaiah.

It was the ladder with the angels ascending and descending for Jacob.

It was the loss of all things for Job.

It was the question posed by the Captain of the Lord's hosts for Joshua.

But whether in a ship, at a home, by a tomb, in the temple, in a dream, through a loss, or on a battlefield, there must be a point where the heart of the Christian attaches itself to the heart of Christ with unwavering fidelity and earnest intensity. The Proof of Devotion.

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15) is an echo of rich encouragement from out of the past. This is devotion holding firm against the battering storm of adversity. This is steadfastness in a trying hour. Add to this the exhibits of Hebrews Chapter 11-those who inarched unfalteringly through the gauntlet of sorrow and suffering. The martyrs of all ages give witness to the same stirring truth.

Devotion to Christ must be apparent in everyone who bears His name. It must characterize every servant, motivate every worshiper, animate every student, and command every brother. This is synonymous with walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. The Way of Holiness The psalmist exulted, "Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever" (Psalms 93:5). Since this was true in the long ago concerning the temple, how very true it must be today concerning the body of the believer in which God the Holy Spirit dwells!

Holiness Becometh the Character.

"Be renewed in the spirit of your mind," the beloved apostle counseled, "and . . . put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:23-24). When

one is born of God, one has the imparted nature of God (2 Peter 1:4). This being so, and God being both righteous and holy, it is not difficult to see why a regenerated person would be created in true holiness. But the practical point is the "putting on" aspect of the counsel. Anything which tends toward the increase of holiness in the experience is consonant with the very nature of the Spirit, and pleasing to Him. The believer is called to "holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7), exhorted to yield his "members servants to righteous unto holiness" (Romans 6:19), and urged to abound in love "to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Then, and only then, can one "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalms 29:2).

Holiness Becometh the Conduct.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

What wholesome instruction! The word "perfecting" means to fulfill, to execute. In three other places (Romans 15:28; 2 Corinthians 8:11; Php 1:6) the word is translated "to perform." Performing holiness in the fear of God is definitely the primary factor in "walking in the comfort [or company] of the Holy Ghost." This condition of being is contingent upon self-cleansing and is encouraged by certain promises. A Life of Service The basic meaning of service is a willing expenditure of self for the benefit of others. This truth was glorified in Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister-to give Himself for others. The Prompting of Love. As Paul and his faithful colleagues pressed onward, through hardship indescribable, they offered but one explanation-"the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The appeal of Christ’s love has an overwhelming effect upon the heart of a true servant. Such service cannot be bought. It is not affected by the time of day, nor the kind of weather, nor yet the confronting difficulties. "Love suffereth long." The dauntless Paul reveals another important fact-"I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son" (Romans 1:9). When one’s spirit is in a thing, the whole of the individual is there. Christian service has no room for a divided heart-no place for a haphazard attempt. "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23), the noble exemplar of devotion pleaded. The whole of our being will be preserved for us by Him if it is reserved for Him by us. The Promise of Honor.

If you find delight in plucking fragrant bouquets from the garden of Scripture, then you will want to gather a few "sweet p’s" from John 12:26 :

The Possibility-"If any man";

The Privilege -"serve me";

The Procedure-"let him follow me";

The Place-"where I am";

The Position -"there shall also my servant be";

The Prerequisite-"if any man serve me";

The Promise-"him will my Father honor."

If, in being honored of men, people are moved with joyful emotion, what will it mean to be honored of God? Yet, this is promised to them who follow Christ in service. If there were no other inducement, this alone should prove impelling. If all Heaven is to be amazed when the ransomed are presented before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24), what will the celestial spectators do when they see the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ honoring redeemed men for having served His Son on earth? The day is fast approaching! With such a glorious prospect, we should be encouraged to emulate the early Christians who, "walking . . . in the comfort of the Holy Ghost," had PEACE, WERE EDIFIED AND MULTIPLIED (Acts 9:31).

05.12- CHAPTER TWELVE -- THE SPIRIT CONVINCES...

CHAPTER TWELVE -- THE SPIRIT CONVINCES OF SIN

"He will reprove the world of sin."

Deity at work may be incomprehensible to the finite mind, but the fact is plainly revealed in the Scriptures.

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," Jesus explained to the irate Jews who had strenuously objected to His healing a paralytic on the Sabbath. Scarcely two years later, He made it clear that the Holy Spirit would work too, coming in due time to pursue a schedule of planned activity unique in design and universal in coverage. With salvation accomplished through the expiatory work of Christ, God sent His Spirit to quicken those dead in trespasses and sins. To accomplish this, He must beat a path of conviction through the underbrush of mental distortions, preconceived ideas, evil traits, the denseness of native darkness, and, often, through the blinding influence of religious creeds and the doctrines of man. His convicting ministry is ever unwanted and always opposed. The unconverted man is at enmity against God.

He resents being termed a sinner.

His pride is injured when told that his self-righteousnesses are, in scriptural terminology, "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6).

His soul rebels at any attempt to curb its lustful tendencies.

He decries the idea of retribution.

Go up to him and tell him he is a sinner; that he is an enemy of God; that the Lord will judge him in due course. Now that the big announcement is made, combine tact and diplomacy with your best forensic logic in an attempt to make him believe and acknowledge it. His reaction will be immediate, emphatic and uncomplimentary. Only the Holy Spirit can bring him to the confession that something is fundamentally wrong in his life and outlook. Only the Holy Spirit could convince Paul, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee without guile, that he was chief of sinners. The Seriousness of Unbelief. The first phase of the Spirit’s threefold activity is the gigantic and humanly impossible task of convincing men of the seriousness of unbelief.

Unbelief in Christ as the One who alone can save is the only unpardonable sin in this age. And why is this so? Because it leaves one in one’s sins, under condemnation and unfit for Heaven.

"He will reprove of sin because they believe not on me" was the declaration of Jesus. Here is purpose with its stated reason. Sin is subtle, nonperturbing, gladly welcomed, and blindly practiced until the Spirit’s pungent conviction unveils its hideous, harmful, grossly pernicious and condemning character. Unbelief does not give up readily nor without a struggle. Conviction alone can penetrate to its roots. It is then the heart cries, "What can wash away my sin?" The Holy Spirit assures, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

If we could trace sin in all its horrible and wicked movements, follow its slimy course through the innumerable bypaths of its unspeakable developments, see its broken and bleeding wrecks strewn along the highway of time, hear the pitiful cries of writhing disillusionment, grief and remorse, we might begin to understand something of the infinite scope of and the imperative need for the Spirit’s convicting work.

Add to this the staggering fact of eternal consequences-the blackness of darkness forever, the lake of fire, the endless nonsatisfaction of inordinate cravings, the inseparable association with the "abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and liars" in an odious atmosphere of everlasting ungodliness. This is something of the pit into which iniquity pours, and the sinner goes in the turbulent way of his sins except he is convinced by the Holy Spirit concerning this dread reality, and becomes willing to receive the Saviour by faith. The Challenge of Christ’s Righteousness The second phase of the Spirit’s threefold operation is to convince men of the righteousness of Christ. This is accomplished by affirming that Christ has returned to the Father, to sit at His right hand. Where is the throne of God? His throne is in Heaven (Psalms 11:4). Can unrighteousness enter Heaven? "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination" (Revelation 21:27). Christ had to be righteous, absolutely spotless, in order to enter in. This is the point which the Spirit proves.

Man in his natural state is devoid of true spiritual appraisal. He possesses no measure or standard by which he can evaluate that which is eternal.

he studies intrinsic values;

he weighs earthly privilege;

he gauges his success by the degree of his inward satisfaction or by the extent of another’s failure.

This of course is materialism in its deceptive character.

it blinds the vision,

it hardens the heart,

it dulls the conscience.

It may allow for religion but has no room for God.

Being good is one thing; being righteous is quite another.

Being good is the outcome of careful conduct; being righteous results from faith in Christ.

The one is the effort of self; the other is the work of the Spirit.

It is a matter of primary importance that man should be convinced that Jesus has gone to the Father.

This proves that His Calvary work was acceptable.

This affirms the essential and indispensable doctrine of His resurrection.

This guarantees that, since He became sin for man, man through His sacrifice may become righteous.

The believer is assured that He has a high priest "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Such transcendent truths are only known through the persuasive, enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit.

Without the enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit, the best we can do is set up a moral code and attempt to shape our lives accordingly.

We say to ourselves, "This is good and that is bad. This is right and that is wrong." Our own conscience becomes the supreme court of discrimination. But there is a tidal wave of influences which constantly alters our judgment. Custom and climate play a perceptible part. We bow to popular opinion. One day we listed as wrong matters which gradually became tolerable and eventually approved. Warmth has become a legitimate excuse for immodesty. Surely it should be convincingly evident that we need the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convince us of true righteousness.

Prince of the World Judged The Spirit also convinces of judgment. How distasteful is the subject to the unregenerate! And well may it be! They are facing it, yet they would rather not think about it. Only the Holy Spirit can overcome this pronounced indifference.

It is ever amazing how the Lord can summarize a profound truth in a terse statement. For instance, "The prince of this world is judged." And who is the "prince of this world"? He is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

How was he judged and when? He was judged by the full, efficacious, substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. The cross sounded the death knell for the archdeceiver of the human race. His doom is sealed. In due course, he will be cast into a place prepared for him and his angels. What bearing has this on man? Great bearing! Solemn bearing! If the prince is judged, then all who follow him will likewise be judged, and with the same judgment, even with the same penalty. To reject the Saviour and refuse His deliverance is to follow Satan to his doom.

Surely our experience has taught us that some supernatural force is necessary to convince the hearts of men in matters of solemn import such as sin and its consequences, righteousness and its reward. And this is the ministry of the Holy Spirit for this age.

05.13- CHAPTER THIRTEEN -- THE SPIRIT ENLARGES...

CHAPTER THIRTEEN -- THE SPIRIT ENLARGES VISION

"The Spirit lifted me up . . . and brought me."

ONLY the holy Spirit can properly emphasize the importance of the imperative. Time and again He employs the word must which allows for no alternative. What He cites as mandatory is always fraught with seriousness. The musts in the New Testament fall into seven general categories:

1. The imperative of the Saviour. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). This is the must of SACRIFICE.

2. The imperative of the Sovereign. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25). This is the must of SUPREMACY.

3. The imperative of the sinner. "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). This is the must of SALVATION.

4. The imperative of the saint. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). This is the must of SUBMISSION.

5. The imperative of the suppliant. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). This is the must of SUPPLICATION.

6. The imperative of the servant. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body" (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is the must of SERVICE.

7. The imperative of Satan. "And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him . . . and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Revelation 20:3). The implication in "a little season" is that he must be disposed of forever. This is the must of SUBJUGATION. The imperative of the sinner (No. 3 above) is primarily dispensational in meaning. The Law was about to change and the Grace order was soon to begin. However, a personal application, supported by New Testament church truth, may be made with profit. "He [Christ] must increase, but I [the believer] must decrease." This is the principle of the diminishing self through the magnification of Christ-something of a dispossession by preoccupation. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in accomplishing this end is illustrated, as perhaps nowhere else, in the experience of Ezekiel. The Inlook

"And the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem . . . where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy" (Ezekiel 8:3).

Carnality.

Thirty odd times Ezekiel testifies, "He brought me." This denotes Spirit leadership and servant obedience, constituting a most interesting study. The first place to which he was brought presented an unsightly object, as do the several that follow. The "image of jealousy" was monumental to the fleshly desires of the people, a display of lustful propensities. In New Testament terminology, it was carnality in its unsuppressed manifestation.

Futile Endeavor.

"And he brought me to the door of the court . . . So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall around about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients [elders] of the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 8:7; Ezekiel 8:10-11).

You may look where you will in the Scriptures, but you will fail to find any warrant for such procedure. The caricatures on the wall, from God's point of view, were "abominable." Carnality robs people of spiritual discernment, obedience and enjoyment. They failed perceptibly, as do we, to appreciate the fact that what God does not authorize He cannot approve; what He cannot approve He will not accept. The artistry may have been the best, their intentions good, their sincerity deep and their unanimity impressive, but it was profitless and provocative as far as the Lord was concerned.

Empty Emotion.

"Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz [the Greek Adonis]" (Ezekiel 8:14). Having departed so far from the true and living God as to acknowledge and worship the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:17), they now have accommodated themselves to the incidental idolatries-the fetishes of the heathen. Ezekiel beheld women with a godly heritage engaging in heathen rites. They wept when Tammuz was lost; they rejoiced when he was found. Pretense can never be more childish. There is no queen of heaven; therefore, she could not have a son to occasion such emotional displays.

Vile Substitution.

"And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshiped the sun" (Ezekiel 8:16). When people turn their backs to "the temple of the Lord" they are deceptively moving toward the unreal, the unauthorized, the unsatisfying. They turn from the Creator to the created, from the Saviour to the sun, from the holy to the profane. How far they went afield in their perverted minds is seen in the following verse: "They commit the abominations . . . they have filled the land with violence . . . lo, they put the branch to their nose" (Ezekiel 8:17). More literally, God is saying, "Look, they are thrusting the branch into my face!" This was the lowest form of moral degradation.

Dissension.

"Moreover, the spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the east gate of the Lord's house . . . and behold at the door of the gate five and twenty men . . . that devise mischief, and give wicked

counsel" (Ezekiel 11:1-2). Satan has from the beginning sought for the internal deterioration of God’s people. Those who play into his hands are unaware that they are mischief-makers.

They are found in every church. Their methods are multiple. They find an outlet in gossip, innuendo, misrepresentation, aspersion, exaggeration, anonymous letters, blackmail and open contention. They said of Jeremiah: "Come, let us devise devices against Jeremiah . . . let us smite him with the tongue" (Jeremiah 18:18).

Captive Believers.

"Afterwards the spirit took me up, and brought me . . . into Chaldea to them of the captivity" (Ezekiel 11:24).

These people of God were captives before they fell into the hands of the Chaldeans. They were fettered by unbelief, rebellion and idolatry. All the foregoing conditions which the Holy Spirit revealed to Ezekiel transpired in or with regard to the place of worship. One cannot but wonder what the all-seeing God discovers in a congregation of people who assemble ostensibly to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. We today lack fervency of spirit, compassion of heart, power in prayer, effectiveness in witness and favor with God-all because we are bound by weights and the sin which doth so easily beset us (Hebrews 12:1). The Uplook The Progressive Revelation.

If Christ is to increase, it should be apparent to even the least informed that the despicable things of the flesh must be eliminated. But how can they be eliminated? All anti-spiritual matters are things of darkness. Darkness is dissipated by the presence of light. Likewise, as Christ is magnified self is minimized. As He becomes formed in us (Galatians 4:19) carnality becomes foreign to us. Again, it is the principle of dispossession by preoccupation.

Returning to Ezekiel for our descriptive illustration of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this regard, we will note the resumption in chapter 40 of the expression, "He brought me." It occurs nine times in this chapter and ten times in the five following chapters. These constitute a Spirit-conducted exploration or examination of the (future) temple. The Spirit brought him in a vision to the various aspects of this glorious edifice. Since in every detail this temple, like its predecessor (and the tabernacle) portrayed the Lord, this rich experience was an upward, purifying look. It was a definite progressive turning from the unholy to the sublime. And this is the vision so prominently emphasized in the New Testament (Luke 21:28; Hebrews 12:2). The Personal Application. The Holy Spirit said to Ezekiel: "Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shall show thee" (Ezekiel 40:4). Compare these words with those found in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 - "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit."

Since it is the Holy Spirit’s ministry to take the things of Christ and to show them unto us (John 16:14), any dedicated Christian may experience in his life what Ezekiel experienced in a vision-a knowledge of the Lord in the purity of His being, the precepts of His wisdom, the power of His resurrection and the prospect of His glorious return. The Practical Presentation. The purpose of the Holy Spirit in taking Ezekiel in a vision to the various details of the temple is clearly stated: "Declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 40:4). Experience makes declaration more meaningful and more effective. When Paul said, "I declare unto you the gospel" (1

Corinthians 15:1), he employed a word seldom used. It is a composite of gnoridzo and ginesko, meaning to proclaim what is personally experienced. This is the equipment the Holy Spirit gives to His servants for their proficiency in ministering. But this was not all the practical instruction given to Ezekiel.

"Thou son of man," said the Spirit, "show the house [the temple that he was shown] to the house [people] of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let their measure the pattern" (Ezekiel 43:10). What else could have convicted those at the "image of jealousy" (Ezekiel 8:3), and the seventy elders before the abominable creatures on the wall (Ezekiel 8:10-11), and the "women weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:14), and the twenty-five men worshiping the sun (Ezekiel 8:16), and the perpetrators of mischief (Ezekiel 11:2)? As the temple was Israel's pattern for holy living, even so is Christ the Christian's standard of godliness. To "measure the pattern" is a form of introspection in the light of God's holy precepts. It is to examine ourselves to see if we be in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). It is to walk in the light as He is in the light, that we might enjoy fellowship with God and with His people (1 John 1:7). The Outlook In Ezekiel Chapter 47, we come to a climactic note in the Holy Spirit's ministry in and for the believer. "Afterward he brought me again unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward" (Ezekiel 47:1). The Saviour's Provision That these waters have to do with life is clearly indicated in verse Ezekiel 47:9 - "Everything . . . whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live."

This is the "water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

This is the effectual flow which the Saviour made available through His work on the cross.

He is the One who will fill this future Temple as the glory of the Lord filled the former one (1 Kings 8:10-11). All that hear (believingly) His voice shall live (John 5:25). He came that we might have life and that we might have it in greater abundance (John 10:10). As the Holy Spirit is honored and obeyed in the application of the Saviour's provision, "Out of his belly [inner being] shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). The Spirit's Challenge

Now the Holy Spirit does a most unusual thing. He gives to His servant a striking vision, both graphic and challenging. Here is Ezekiel's description of it: "He brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles . . . [He] brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees . . . [He] brought me through; the waters were to the loins . . . and it was a river . . . waters to swim in" (Ezekiel 47:3-5).

Keeping in mind that the "waters" symbolize "life" (Ezekiel 47:9), spiritual life, salvation of the Lord, it is not difficult to see this progressive operation of the Spirit in a believing human heart.

One who is in the "waters," though only ankle deep, has experienced salvation. It is only a beginning however. Such. are termed "scarcely saved" (1 Peter 4:18).

To be knee deep speaks of advancement and typifies a praying, devoted believer (Ephesians 3:14).

To be hip deep in the things of God would indicate preparation for action as the Easterner in ancient days gathered up his flowing garment to the waist for greater freedom of motion.

To swim is to reach that experience where, as waters buoy the swimmer, one is borne along by a power external to himself. It reveals the more abundant life, the Spirit taking control (Galatians 2:20).

Herein is illustrated the principle of the diminishing self.

Ankle deep allows much of the body to be seen;

knee deep less;

hip deep still less.

But to swim obscures almost the whole. The spiritual application is apparent. Perhaps we could paraphrase a familiar hymn by stating, "Rivers of blessing, rivers of blessing we need.

Ankle-deep waters are precious, but for the rivers we plead." The Saint’s Decision.

God never designed that man should be an automaton. The Spirit will not force one into the deep waters. He may allow circumstances to induce a desire or to dictate the move, but man may believe or not believe, he may possess or lack the things divinely provided for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Peter 1:8-9). Thus, the experience of Ezekiel has another important aspect: "He brought me, and caused me to return to the brink of the river" (Ezekiel 47:6).

Here is disclosed the important fact that the Holy Spirit will give the vision but man himself must make the decision.

No one can get even ankle deep in salvation by himself, for the believer "is born of the Spirit" (John 3:6).

He cannot become knee deep in his own strength for man does not know how to pray as he ought. "The Spirit . . . maketh intercession for him" (Romans 8:26).

He cannot prepare himself for productive action, for "it is the spirit that [who] quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63).

Thus, after the Spirit brought Ezekiel out to where he could see the deep waters, He returned him to the shore. Now it was incumbent upon him as to whether he would plunge into the deep waters. It is likewise the decision of the believer today as to whether he will cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23), by being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and yield himself wholly to the Lord (Romans 12:1). Nevertheless, the imperative of the saint stands out in broad relief.

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

05.14- CHAPTER FOURTEEN -- THE SPIRIT KNOWS...

CHAPTER FOURTEEN -- THE SPIRIT KNOWS THE FUTURE

"He will show you things to come."

The future is locked away in the omniscience of God. It is hidden completely from the eyes of man. What it holds, what it will bring, must await the gradual unfolding of time. History is the beaten path that man has wearily traversed. Prophecy is the future that lies secretly secured in the hand of God. But there are things to come! This is an interesting feature about the textual revelation. It arrests the attention of man immediately. All are curious about what lies beyond. Were this not true, fortune tellers could not exist. Their patrons are illustrative of the universal longing in the breast of man to penetrate the future. Of course, palm reading, crystal gazing and teacup prognosticating never bring assurance. No discerning person would repose confidence in such speculation. Jesus said that the Spirit, not man, would show us "things to come."

It is encouraging to notice that the text affirms the omniscience of the Spirit. He knows the future. It also infers His power and purpose to disclose for human comprehension and appreciation "things to come."

When, during World War I, the planes were releasing destructive explosives, Tennyson’s Lockesley Hall was cited as a prophecy come true. The poet was posthumously accredited with being a prophet. Said he a generation previously:

I dipped into the future far as human eye could see, Saw the wonders of the world and the glories that should be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sail- Pilots of the purple twilight, casting down their costly bale.

Two Aspects of Prediction That the thought expressed in these lines proved co-incidental with developments rather than anticipative of them is found in the qualification of the first line; namely, "as far as human eye could see." Perhaps we should be reminded that prophecy is both predictive and perceptive; predictive when the conclusions are obscured, and perceptive when conceptions are obvious.

Man can predicate certain conclusions on the basis of conditions or signs. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that "when it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red and lowering." Weather conditions, economic tendencies, business trends, even epidemics can be predicted on the strength of certain signs. Exposure to cold or dampness, then a sneeze, and most of us can predict a head cold. Certain situations are logical results-the outcome of evident indications. This opens a wide field for human speculation, and, in every age, men engage in this art. In the predictive phase where the conclusions are obscured, there is a different picture entirely.

Long ago, it was made clear to Moses that "the secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." By whom are they revealed? In days gone by, the power of predictive prophecy was vouchsafed to certain of God's servants, but even in such cases it was the revelation of the Lord to them. For instance, "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision" (Daniel 2:19). The Spirit's Prerogative In this age, the matter of unveiling the future is delegated to the Holy Spirit, and to no other. Jesus said, "He will show you things to come" (John 16:13). The uniqueness of the Spirit's position and prerogative in this respect is further emphasized in the writings of Paul: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). Nor does He reveal only those things which God has prepared for them that love Him. He also reveals the sorrowful doom of those who reject Christ. The study of prophecy brings to light some very interesting observations.

Prophecy proves the fact of Omniscience.

Prophecy supports the veracity of the Scriptures.

Prophecy presents a beacon for mankind.

It also poses some pertinent questions. The Recording of Prophecy How was prophecy given?

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). A paraphrase of this verse would be, "but being borne on by the Holy Ghost, men spake from God." It did not result from either the thinking or the discovery of man. No individual is quoted in the sacred Canon as delving into the future "as far as human eye can see." The Record states that they were "borne along"-impelled by a Spirit mightier than themselves.

Man may search and submit his findings, but his field, faculties and facilities are restricted. He operates "under the sun."

He examines matter and investigates fixed laws, but when it comes to a glimpse of what is beyond, God appoints His Holy Spirit to draw back the curtain. Since He has no visible body, He has used human instrumentality with an impelling force which man does not natively possess. This is how prophecy was given. The Exactitude of Prophecy How is prophecy strengthened? This is, admittedly, an elementary question. Prophecy is given of the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of power-of divine power. What He does, what He says, needs no added support.

We cannot embellish the Truth with human eloquence; it is inherently beautiful.

We cannot strengthen the Truth with forensic logic; it is already "quick and powerful."

We cannot add to the effectiveness of Truth by any human skill; it is ever "sharper than any two-edged sword."

We cannot augment the wonders of Revelation. Our appreciation of prophecy, though, is definitely enhanced by the exactitude of its fulfillment. "We have also the word of prophecy made more sure" (2 Peter 1:19, marg.). It is both reassuring and comforting to examine prophecy already fulfilled. A

total of thirty-three Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in one day when Jesus was crucified. It would seem that an unseen Hand was that day directing in every detail. In a very real sense this was true, and in a very real sense this will be true forever. The Voice of authority speaks unequivocally on this point: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18).

Understanding Prophecy How may prophecy be understood? When the late Dr. William L. Pettingill, one of the strongest advocates of the prophetic Word in his generation, was conducting a Bible-teaching mission, he met, as usual, some very querulous people. One woman asked, "How do you read prophetic Scriptures?"

"The very same way you would read any written matter," was the quick reply.

"But how would you read, for instance, Acts 1:11?" she continued.

"I would begin as I learned to read as a child and with the same relaxed confidence," lie answered. "I remember reading, 'This-is -a-bird. This-is-a-dog. This-is-a-cow.' I would therefore read Acts 1:11 with the same kind of deliberation and belief. 'This- same - Jesus - which - is - taken - up - from - you - into - heaven, - shall - so - come - in - like - manner - as - ye - have - seen - him - go - into - heaven.'"

Reading, of course, is one thing; understanding is quite another. It is good to read the prophetic presentations. "Blessed is he that readeth . . . the words of this prophecy" (Revelation 1:3). It is given to us to understand as well. "Know, therefore, and understand," was the clear instruction of the Lord to Daniel; but "knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). More literally, "No prophecy of the scripture is to be presented from any private or personal point of view." Thus, to know how prophecy is not to be considered is perhaps the best assistance toward the right procedure and the proper conception. Prophecy always falls into a pattern designed by infinite wisdom and does not allow for the injection of human opinion. In His encouragement to compare scripture with scripture the Holy Spirit eliminates all possibility of contradictions in His revelation of "things to come." The Termination of Prophecy When will prophecy terminate?

Prophecy, as we understand it, will terminate when God finishes His dealings with His ancient people and fulfills all His promises to them. Daniel 9:24 is a summation of the matter.

God will:

(1) finish the transgression;

(2) make an end of sins;

(3) make reconciliation for iniquity;

(4) bring in everlasting righteousness;

(5) seal up the vision and prophecy;

(6) anoint the Holy of Holies. This is, in a sense, the epitome of prophecy.

There is a practical aspect to the prophetic Scriptures. It is threefold in its appeal. Prophecy is given by the Holy Spirit to comfort, to encourage and to warn.

Prophecy Uplift to Christians To comfort.

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass" (Matthew 24:6). This was a gloomy forecast, but time has proved its accuracy, and what painful reminders are upon us at the moment. The "must" of inevitability in our Lord's prophetic utterance has defied all peace conferences and men's hopeful arrangements to outlaw war. Battlefields, bloodshed, broken hearts and blasted hopes paint a somber picture before the eyes of a race that is helpless to change it. Scarcely is an armistice arranged or a treaty signed, pursuant to a savage conflict, until rumors begin to befog the horizon of man's dreams. Threatening storms loom much of the time with their distressing portents. The Lord does not evacuate His people from the scene every time the Devil goes on a rampage. But He does fortify them in the midst of trial. "See that ye be not troubled," is the comforting counsel of Him who sees each falling tear and measures the quickened heartbeat.

This, then, is the shining ray which penetrates the gloominess of the inevitable.

It is not a meteor cutting the inky darkness of the midnight sky.

It is not a flash that fades.

It is not a dash of light that cannot be traced.

It is a persistent light that lingers and lasts. Its source is evident. Its meaning is clear. Its message is a boon to fainting hearts and faltering spirits.

Prophecy Bolsters Faith To Encourage.

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). Look up! Lift up! Here is the terse command of the Captain of our salvation. The uplook is vision; the uplift is victory. Victory never conies without vision, and never before it.

While the hearts of unbelieving men fail them for fear, beholding those things which are coming to pass on the earth, the hopefulness of the believer is bolstered by the assurance of the coming again of the Lord, "Your redemption draweth nigh." It is the greatest inducement for the Christian to press on amid the sinful ways of men and the frightening developments of the age. The Admonitory Note in Prophecy To Warn.

Prophecy is given not only to comfort and to encourage, but to warn as well. To warn means to admonish, to enlighten by caution, to call attention to, to put in mind. "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). And what was there in the unfolding of time and in the development of events which moved the heart of Christ to sound a warning for His people? He knew that there would appear on the stage of life certain impersonators of Himself. Indeed, He said there would be many. The writer had just completed a message at a Bible conference and was standing with other servants of the Lord near the exit of the edifice when a man with a profuse beard made a gracious

approach with these words, "Do you not know me?"

"I think I have never met you before," I replied.

"Oh, yes you have!" he quickly and rather emphatically responded.

Then taking from his pocket a neat leather case, he withdrew an identification card bearing these words, "The Son of the Living God." There were no quotation marks about the words, and no further explanation from his lips.

"Where have you come from?" I asked.

"My father brought me here," he stated.

"And where are you going tonight?" I inquired.

"My father knows," was his terse but confident answer. The reader may quickly dismiss this experience by attributing to the strange individual the status of a mentally unbalanced person. But he was not unbalanced. He possessed remarkable poise. He was most polite. He spoke with the clearest of diction, and with directness. True, his mind had been overpowered; his thoughts had been captured. He was representing himself to be someone he was not. Perhaps no one has ever believed him, or followed him, but Jesus prophesied that "many" shall come in His name and shall deceive "many." Some are believed and followed. A photostatic copy of a check in the amount of $185,000.00 was widely published some years ago as having been given to one who claims to be the Christ. This indicates substantial interest in a false cause and the extent to which deception may lead. The Birds in the Tree The Lord Jesus may not have limited His concern to individual claims. He could have had in mind organized movements as well. Jesus spoke of birds lodging in the twisted, confusing branches of the tree which represents Christendom (Matthew 13:32). These "birds" are most certainly the diversity of sects and cults and isms which are flourishing amid a decadent Protestantism. The chirping of these birds has attracted the attention of a great following. "Take heed that no man deceive you," Jesus admonished. There was never a time when this counsel was more necessary than now.

Prophetic truth reveals that there will be an increase of this diverting artifice. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13). They are stars, wandering stars, without light (Jude 1:13).

We look askance upon a man, be he ever so polite, who identifies himself as "the Son of the Living God." We count it a serious offense indeed. On the other hand, many claim to be Christians who are not. In both cases, there is misrepresentation. The one played the part by wearing a beard and disclaiming all earthly relationship. Others feign the Christian position by asserting that they "keep the Ten Commandments," are devotees of a certain creed, or are living a good Me. Such are misled, and this is exactly the meaning of the word "deceive" which Jesus used in forecasting the trend of the age. The primary purpose of prophecy, then, is to comfort, to encourage, to warn.

05.15- CHAPTER FIFTEEN -- THE SPIRIT POSES...

CHAPTER FIFTEEN -- THE SPIRIT POSES A QUESTION

"What manner of persons ought ye to be?"

The holy spirit makes effective use of the interrogation. He does it in a pressing, piercing and provocative manner. There are three things to notice about the question of our text:

(1) Its suddenness. It emerges abruptly in the midst of a fearful revelation.

(2) Its solemnity. It is asked in view of the dissolution of all things with great noise and fervent heat-a staggering thought, the proportions and character of which cannot be comprehended by the human mind.

(3) Its significance. It is posed as an inducement to readiness for the coming of the Lord.

What kind of person should one be when Christ returns? We need not depend on our imperfect judgment for the answer. All the required characteristics have been clearly designated in His Word. And the Holy Spirit waits to make them real in the life of the believer. A Holy People Holiness a requirement of the Lord.

"Be ye holy; for I am holy" is a New Testament repetition of an Old Testament command, proving the unchangeableness of the divine standard. With Andrew Murray, we would do well to pray: "Teach us, O Lord, how holy Thou art that we may know how holy Thou dost want us to be." There is not in Scripture a word more distinctly divine in its origin and meaning than the word "holy." No word leads one higher into the mysteries of Deity nor deeper into the blessedness of God’s children. Yet, it is a word many Christians never clearly appreciate. Since two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3), the believer cannot enjoy fellowship with the Lord until he knows in his experience something concerning this truth (2 Corinthians 7:1). Only the Holy Spirit can help us here.

Holiness a rejection of Christ. A Christian is primarily an imitator of Christ. And when our Father asks that we be holy as He is holy, He is asking that His Son be seen in us, for Christ is the embodiment of holiness. In the miracle of the new birth, we receive the Spirit of God’s Son (Galatians 4:6). In the matter of growth in grace, the Holy Spirit makes us more Christlike. This is the whole design of the doctrine of holiness. There was a day when people were able to take knowledge that certain ones had been with Jesus. They carried with them something of the sweetness of His presence in their conduct. There was a time when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was so manifest in the lives of His devoted followers that they were called "Christ-i-ans," that is, "Christ-ones" or "Christ-followers." It is this reflection of God’s Son which the Holy Spirit wants to produce today.

Holiness a result of the Spirit’s work.

It would be difficult to conceive how one could be holy in his conversation and conduct apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The fact is, it is not only inconceivable, it is impossible. Let us remember, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh [self] profiteth nothing." This leaves no alternative for the believer. The psalmist, in his expressed longing for a life of holiness, cried, "Quicken me!" Nine times this outburst is found in the 119th Psalm. There are, we will recall, nine component parts to the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians chapter 5. And the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of quickening-the manifestation of the holy life which the Spirit makes possible in a yielded believer. A Faithful People In view of the coming of the Lord, steadfastness should be the watchword of the hour.

Faithfulness dependent upon establishment. The word "establish" has a strong practical connotation.

It suggests firmness, stability, growth and healthfulness.

It portrays roots sunken deeply in the soil of life-giving Truth (Psalms 1:3).

It speaks of stalwartness in the field of conquest,

of orthodoxy in the realm of Bible belief,

of maturity in the sphere of spiritual profession,

of devoted attachment in the orbit of Christian dedication.

It conveys the thought of being strengthened, or of becoming successful.

It makes one dependable and profitable, not likely to be tossed to and fro as a child with every or with any contrary wind of doctrine.

And this is precisely the manner of persons we ought to be as the end time storms increase with frightful intensity. This is the kind of persons we should be as we anticipate the glorious appearing of our blessed Lord.

Faithfulness contingent upon discernment.

"He that is spiritual judgeth [discerneth] all things" (1 Corinthians 2:15), and spiritual discernment is one of the gifts of the Spirit.

It is the discriminating potential so essential in choosing.

It equips one to distinguish between truth and error, between the flesh and the spirit, between self-interest and the will of God.

It is the chief prerequisite to vision.

It is indispensable to Bible study, especially in prophecy and doctrine.

Faithfulness the proof of steadfastness.

What is more pathetic than a vacillating, deviating, fluctuating individual who claims vital union with the sustaining, unchangeable God? In Deuteronomy, Moses five times exhorted the people to "cleave unto the Lord thy God" for- 1. The course of spiritual survival (Deuteronomy 4:4) 2. The

avenue to prosperity (Deuteronomy 10:20) 3. The guarantee of safety (Deuteronomy 11:22) 4. The safeguard against seduction (Deuteronomy 13:4) 5. The promise of satisfaction (Deuteronomy 30:20) The New Testament parallelisms are found, respectively:

in cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23),

in yielding bodies for service (Romans 12:1),

in being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18),

in being steadfast (1 Corinthians 15:58),

in abiding in Him (1 John 2:28).

The practical ministry of the Holy Spirit in making Christians to be what they ought to be is exhibited in many revealing ways.

He wants to captivate the heart.

He desires to illuminate the mind.

He waits to animate the life.

The Holy Spirit alone can promote us in an unbroken fellowship with God. An Active People

"Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). The reason is given in verse James 2:17 of the same chapter: "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." Here is something of a desertion or oversight or neglect. Faith neglected grows anemic as does a plant cut off from the sun. Faith must not be left alone. It will die, and with its death destitution ensues.

It requires living faith to please God, for "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6 a).

It requires living faith to pray, for "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6 b).

It requires faith to progress, for "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20).

It requires living faith to prevail, for "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

And faith is doing what God’s Word commands. When one operates within the orbit of divine approval, he may expect both assistance and blessing from above. But let us all be solemnly advised that what God does not authorize, He cannot approve; what He cannot approve, He will not accept. To do other than the Bible instructs is a venture without profit, a dissipation of energy. Vain oblations today, as of old, weary the Most High. A Prepared People

There will be a dissolution of all things, a pouring forth of the vials of divine wrath upon this world which rejected Heaven’s offer of grace.

They sink with the floundering vessel who refuse the lifeboat.

They burn with the flaming building who spurn rescue attempts.

They perish in the disaster who fail to take the provided refuge.

But what manner of persons ought they to be who have the assurance of escaping the wrath to come? They should be holy, faithful, active, joyful and thankful. Above all, they must be ready. Let us observe some of the characteristics of a ready people for the coming of the Lord. An informed people.

"When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:33). All future developments in the divine economy hinge on the second coming of Christ, and Jesus had been briefing His disciples on striking facts incident to this tremendous event-the universal effect, the rapidity of its accomplishment, etc.

Within our own generation we have witnessed many startling developments which bear a striking resemblance to the subject which Jesus was setting forth. Indeed, they are of such a nature as to establish convincing pertinence. We have seen Palestine delivered from the Turks, her deserts blossoming as a rose, and her becoming an important exporter of citrus fruits. We have seen the rebirth of Jewish statehood, after 2,000 years of nonexistence-a new political entity universally recognized, with envoys and purchasing commissions in countries far and wide.

We have seen the white man being evacuated from Asia, fulfilling the slogan "Asia for the Asiatics." We have seen the alignment of nations by political treaty, economic agreement and security alliance, to such an extent that the stage seems already arranged for the end-time struggle and eventual Battle of Armageddon. We have seen an erstwhile backward country become a colossal terror to the world, enveloping more than half the human race in our generation.

Concurrently, and as the main contributing factor:

we have seen the dark, dismal shadows of apostasy lengthening into depressing darkness as the "salt of the earth" loses its savor.

we have seen church attendance decline and immorality and crime increase without precedent.

We have witnessed the attempt of man to conquer outer space.

we have seen destructive devices produced which threaten the annihilation of the race.

As children of God, taught of the Spirit, we should have sufficient knowledge to maintain a noticeable poise amid a world of fainting hearts and frustrated minds, to maintain an uplook which invigorates and stabilizes. An alert people.

"Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42).

It should at least occur to the thinking mind that the Lord Jesus had something important and necessary incorporated into this exhortation. He deemed it wise to encourage alertness. Paul took Him seriously and lived in the light and challenge of this stirring truth. He pressed this message upon the hearts of others: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of

darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6). A ready people.

"Therefore, be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." With the certainty of the event, and with the uncertainty of the time of its fulfillment, does it not seem most reasonable that readiness should be the practice of sincere Christians? But what does readiness involve?

Readiness involves:

assurance of salvation,

thoroughness of dedication,

constancy of communion,

closeness of fellowship,

faithfulness in service,

cleanness of life.

Who is sufficient for these things? With what unspeakable urgency we must yield ourselves, body, soul and spirit, to the precious ministry of the Holy Spirit!

What manner of persons ought ye to be? The question resolves itself into a very obvious answer.

We ought to be people who are:

born of the Spirit,

cleansed of the Spirit,

filled with the Spirit,

empowered by the Spirit,

led of the Spirit

used of the Spirit.

05.16- CHAPTER SIXTEEN -- THE SPIRIT AND THE ONE...

CHAPTER SIXTEEN -- THE SPIRIT AND THE ONE BAPTISM

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

Paul was an authority on church doctrine. His Ephesian epistle is without doubt the highest peak in a mountain range of revelation bearing on church truth. This letter of six chapters falls readily into two general divisions of three chapters each, the first division emphasizing the position of the believer, and the second his practice. The believer is equally helpless in both areas. Hence, the necessity for divine assistance. The Godhead is manifested in the opening of the first division. The saint is:

blessed of the Father with all spiritual blessings;

accepted in the Son,

sealed by the Spirit until the day of redemption.

But the Godhead is just as prominent in the beginning of the second division:

the Spirit in building the "body of Christ,"

the Son in His provisions for His church,

the Father in His sovereign surveillance.

In the seven unities of Ephesians Chapter 4, the church is not acting. It is being acted upon.

These are not, therefore (contrary to popular opinion), unities for the believer to keep. They are being kept by the eternal Godhead for the benefit of the believer. Our salvation, security and satisfaction all rest upon the counsels and operations of the Holy Trinity. To secure our position "in the heavenlies" required the interposition of each member of the Godhead. To support our practice on earth necessitates no lesser assistance. Thus, as we begin to walk and serve, as the "prisoner of the Lord" entreats us in chapter 4, we are assured of the co-ordinated cooperation of the Spirit, the Son and the Father. Otherwise, there could be no worthy walk in the "vocation wherewith ye are called." In this practical division of Ephesians, the apostle calls for a walk worthy of our position (Ephesians 4:1).

In verse Ephesians 4:2, he describes in a general way the character of one so walking.

In verse Ephesians 4:3, he urges diligence in keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Then, practical matters are abruptly interrupted to be continued in verse Ephesians 4:7.

In the intervening verses (Ephesians 4:4-6) there are no ethical instructions or practical precepts or promotional commands.

On the contrary, our eyes are turned upward and we have the introduction of the Godhead with pertinent facts appended to the mention of each member. And herein is the guarantee for a display of practical godliness for those who are "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Otherwise, our frailties would discourage us utterly. We would be forced with the psalmist to ask in our perplexity, "Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?" Or inquire with Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" Hence, the interjection at this point of the divine encouragement. "It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron," Samuel reminded the ancient people of God who were then walking so unworthily. And spiritual promotion can come from no other source today. The presence of the Godhead in these three verses of Ephesians (Ephesians 4:4-6) is so very obvious that no one can escape the fact. The Spirit is in verse Ephesians 4:4, the Son in verse Ephesians 4:5, and the Father in verse Ephesians 4:6. This being true, it seems soundly in keeping with the simplest rule of Bible exegesis that the Person of the Godhead mentioned in the verse is the subject of the verse-the Spirit (v. Ephesians 4:4), the Son (v. Ephesians 4:5), and the Father (v. Ephesians 4:6). The Spirit and the Believer’s Walk The purpose of the Godhead in this day of grace is the forming of "one body"-the Body of Christ, the Church.

The prospect of this one Body is "one hope."

The reason for the existence of the "one body" with the "one hope" is the indwelling of the "one Spirit."

Without His presence and help, there can be no worthy walk. The Holy Spirit baptizes into this "one body" and seals such members until the "purchased possession" is delivered in the presence of the Father with exceeding joy. He indwells, enlightens, empowers and directs. If this were not actually true, then the holy standard of godly behavior as outlined by the apostle is hopelessly beyond the pale of possibility. The Son and the Believer’s Walk The Son, then, is the subject of verse Ephesians 4:5, which reads, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

We cannot, therefore, take either the "one faith" or the "one baptism" and, bypassing the Son, transfer such to the Spirit of the preceding verse. To make this "one baptism" the baptism of the Spirit is wrong textually, doctrinally, and logically. The baptism of the Spirit is the initial operation, and, at this point in the epistle, the believer has already become seated in the heavenlies in Christ, accepted in the Beloved by the Father, and sealed until the day of redemption by the Spirit. No, the "one faith" and the "one baptism," we must conclude, pertain to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the subject of the verse where they are contained. Of course, we have more than textual arrangement to support this view.

Concerning the "one faith," the Lord Jesus is the Author through His death (Hebrews 12:2). He is the validifier of faith in His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:17). And He is the bestower of faith in His advocacy (Galatians 2:20, last clause). Now each believer, with Paul, may "live by the faith of the Son of God." This of course is the worthy walk. As for the "one baptism," shall we leave it in the text where divine inspiration has placed it? Or shall we shift it around as a convenience for some private interpretation? Let us willingly leave it where it is. Of course, we can all agree that "one" means one. But should we not learn for the sake of accuracy in what category or sphere the unity applies? The term "one baptism" cannot stand alone. It cannot stand without qualification. It could

not mean that there is only one baptism referred to in the Bible. This obviously would be untrue. If we are justified in believing that the Son of God is the subject of verse 5, may we not then conclude that the "one baptism" of the verse pertains to Him? By what rule or law could we by-pass the Son, the subject of the verse, and place it back in the preceding verse to attach it to the subject of that verse, namely the Spirit, making it the "baptism of the Spirit"?

Here is an illustration in point: the 36th Psalm deals with the sinner (vv. Psalms 36:1-4), the Saviour (vv. Psalms 36:5-6), and the saint (vv Psalms 36:7-11). The subject of each division has certain characteristics appended. The sinner is said to be indifferent, conceited, deceitful, perverse, foolish, mischievous, wayward and sinful. The Saviour is presented as merciful, faithful, righteous, just, powerful and gracious. The saint is shown in his confidence, satisfaction, desire and apprehension. Surely we would not transfer the characteristics of the Saviour to the sinner or vice versa. The sinner is not merciful, righteous or just. Nor is the Saviour deceitful, foolish or mischievous. Is not the scriptural construction similar in Ephesians 4:4-6?

Leaving the words where the Holy Spirit has put them in Ephesians 4:5, the "one baptism" must refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the subject of the verse. But if it relates to His baptism in the Jordan at the hands of John the Baptist (the Law), it would be out of place in this part of God’s Word. It would not fit in with the message at hand. These are basic matters concerning the new life and the new walk of the believer in the day of grace. Does the Bible say anything else about Jesus and baptism? Note the solemn question which Jesus put to James and John, the sons of Zebedee: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:38). This is His death, and His death has everything to do with the believer’s walk. Paul, referring devotedly and appreciatively to the cross of Christ, testified: ". . . by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Not only this, observe how the faith and death of our Lord are associated, even in separably connected, in the two key verse: quoted above: ". . . the author and finisher of faith . . . endured the cross, despising the shame." "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself [died] for me." The faith by which we now live in this body is the product of our Saviour’s death in the flesh.

He was enveloped in the heaviness of sorrow (Matthew 26:38).

He was thrust into the horrors of Hell (Psalms 116:3).

He was plunged into the heat of divine wrath (Isaiah 53:10).

This was a baptism indeed! Without it, there could be neither a high calling nor a holy conduct. The Father and the Believer’s Walk As there is one Spirit and one Lord, even so there is "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The Father is above all in His divine exaltation.

It was most appropriate, therefore, for Moses to sing about the "greatness of thine excellency" when the Israelites were so miraculously delivered through the Red Sea. The Father is through all in creation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork." And man is "fearfully and wonderfully made." The fingerprints of the Almighty are everywhere throughout His creation. The Father is "in you all" by regeneration. The last part of this remarkable series has a

noticeable qualification-"in you all." The "you" designates the saints to whom Paul addressed the letter and, indeed, all who are born again. "We are partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). The interposition of the Godhead is what makes more abundant in us the life which Jesus made possible for us in His death, resurrection and intercession. This fact only can produce in the believer a walk worthy of his high calling. In the positional division of the Ephesian epistle, the Godhead is introduced first as Father, the Son next, then the Spirit. In the practical division, it is the Spirit, the Son, and the Father. This same order is found in the establishing of the tabernacle in the wilderness and its worship. "God begins from Himself, working outward toward man; the worshiper begins from himself, moving toward God" (Scofield Reference Bible).

God reaches the sinner, hopeless in his helplessness, through the death of His Son and the regeneration of His Spirit. The saint reaches God through the enablement of the Spirit (Romans 8:26), and the intercession of His Son. but, let us witness the continuing essentiality of the cross work of Christ. His blood is not only the basis of the sinner’s justification (Romans 5:9), but of the saint’s separation (Galatians 6:14), and the martyr’s triumph (Revelation 12:11) as well. The baptism of the Spirit introduces the believer into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13); the baptism of Christ’s death cleanses the members of that body (1 John 1:7) and qualifies them for the walk worthy of this exalted calling (Ephesians 4:3). The cross of Christ has- must of necessity ever have-a tremendous bearing upon the attitudes and actions of the child of God, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Since the "baptism of the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13) has to do with spiritual birth, this has taken place in the first division of Ephesians where the believer has been made "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6), and sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). The "one baptism" in the second division has to do with the practice the believer is exhorted to pursue. Birth is one thing; walk is quite another.

Thus, the context would seem to encourage the following conclusion:

In verse Ephesians 1:4 - Position and prospect through the Spirit.

In verse Ephesians 1:5 - Faith and cleansing in the Son.

In verse Ephesians 1:6 - Relationship and nearness to God the Father.

05.17- CHAPTER SEVENTEEN -- THE SPIRIT UNKNOWN TO MANY

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN -- THE SPIRIT UNKNOWN TO MANY

"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost"

Twelve men-all in one place and on one occasion-were puzzled when the Holy Spirit was mentioned. They had never heard of Him. Their kind today is legion.

Remember, however, these were religious men. They had been baptized. They knew John but did not know Jesus. One only knows the Saviour who has come into contact with the Spirit. These men were in the dark on the matter. When they met Paul they met one who knew the Spirit. He, knowing the Spirit, was able to introduce them to One greater than John, and a dozen men walked out of darkness into light.

It all happened on this wise. Paul was an itinerant preacher. Wherever he went, "as his custom was," he preached Christ. Some listened; others turned away. Some showed respect; others disdain. At Ephesus, he discovered twelve men referred to as disciples. At once he detected a missing essential. This gave rise to his question and to their confession.

"Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" he inquired.

"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," was their blunt reply. A Fisher of Men

Twelve men proved themselves to be in the dark on the most profound of all matters. They needed spiritual enlightenment, and who better than Paul could furnish it? We are particularly impressed with his alertness, directness and interest in their case. The apostle was in a magnificent manner a fisher of men. A lady selling purple by the way, a jailer in mental distress, a king in his abounding luxury-such elicited compassion from the heart of this faithful witness. But, speaking of fishing for men, here was a school of twelve. Nor was it difficult for a discerning one such as he to discover their need. They displayed earnestness, but men may be earnest and still be lost. They were solicitous of the welfare of others, but one may be considerate of others and still miss Heaven. They were gracious in their attitudes, but one may have the finest of traits and be without the grace of God that bringeth salvation.

People are either saved or lost. The twelve disciples at Ephesus labored the fact that they were believers. (This proves that the term "believers" may suffer sadly from too wide an application.) Here was Paul’s opportunity. He grasped it at once. "Have ye receive the Holy Spirit since [when] ye believed?" he asked. Their answer confirmed Paul’s assumption. They knew neither the truth of the Gospel nor the Teacher of its message. The Immediate Acknowledgment

Without argument or apology, the twelve frankly stated they had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. They might have explained that they had never taken such a course at the seminary. They might have related how they had had a bright-light vision one day and that they based their hope

upon this phenomenon. No, they were truthful in their answer and humble in their admission. They had never heard about the Holy Spirit.

Such honesty today would be a hopeful sign. Altogether too many think so, guess so, hope so, betraying a pitiful indefiniteness. With no assurance of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and little or no knowledge of His person and work, many cling to fragments of a hopeless tradition as they drift toward eternal calamity.

Give us people who, instead of claiming they are Christians because they are not Jews, will humbly confess that they do not know Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Give us people who, instead of hoping for a better "hereafter" because of good conduct, will acknowledge that they have not God.

Give us people who, instead of making excuses for lack of spiritual fruit, will say that they know not the Holy Spirit.

Immediately upon such a confession from the twelve, the apostle was in a position to help them. No Objection Registered These men at Ephesus registered no objection when Paul intruded himself upon them.

It was sudden but not disturbing.

It was different but not resented.

It was revealing and welcomed.

They admitted that they had not gotten beyond John’s baptism. Apparently they had not learned that John was but the fading voice of a dying age.

They obviously did not understand that John himself said that One greater than he must increase and that he must decrease. It is evident they had not followed the finger of John in pointing to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. Then, admittedly, they were not advised of the fact that a Member of the Godhead was to come to apply the merits of Christ’s cross work to believing men. They did not know that this divine Administrator was the Holy Spirit. But they were willing both to hear and to learn. The Truth Welcomed

Like the Ethiopian on the way to Gaza, these men needed only a helping hand from someone who knew. Thus it did not require preparatory work on the part of Paul. Here is one of the wonderful features about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He works at both ends. He can get a sinner ready for the message if He has a messenger ready for the contact.

"We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," the men unitedly confessed. They had not even picked up a rumor to this effect. Yet almost a score of years had passed into history since the great Day of Pentecost on which the Holy Spirit made His debut for His present ministry. It is conjectured that these men lived a distance from Jerusalem; that poor communications of that ancient day prevented them from hearing; that their associations were outside the Christian realm. Whatever the true reason, these men had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. The Destitute Directed

Now what can all this mean? What would one lack who had not heard of the Holy Spirit? Could these have been Christian? Some say "yes." Some say "no." A Christian is a follower of Christ. Christ said much about the Holy Spirit. Had these men been following Him, they would have heard His references to the Spirit. Had they been post-Pentecostal converts, they would have heard the apostles talking about the Spirit. They would have known, at some time, of the Holy Spirit performing His work in those who believed in Christ. They were in no wise reluctant or embarrassed to announce that they had not gone beyond John's baptism. Not having heard of the Person of the Holy Spirit, how could these men be aware of His presence? Without an awareness of His presence, how could they know about His power? Yes, they were in the dark. Anyone is in the dark who has not heard of the Holy Spirit. Since they had not so much as heard of Him, they did not know that He had come. They did not know why He came. They were not born again because to be born again is to be born of the Spirit. They had no witness that they belonged to God because the Holy Spirit is the witness (Romans 8:16). They could not have been of Christ, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). But whatever neglect there had been is now to be corrected. Paul wisely led these disciples of John back to the words of the baptizer who told his followers they must believe on Him who should come, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. These disciples of John, however, were still adherents to the old order. Had they been properly informed, they would have known that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4). A New Baptism A whole new area of divine Truth was being opened to their ready minds and receptive hearts. Their actual introduction to the Saviour and their reception of Him by faith are not recorded. This is implied, of course, in their baptism. And here, let us observe that when people were led to the Lord by Paul and given instruction in the new life, they invariably were baptized, and that immediately. This was true with Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), with the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:32-33), with Crispus and his house (Acts 18:8), and with the twelve Jews of Ephesus (Acts 19:5). When they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, they came into a new position. As Paul laid his hands upon them and the Holy Ghost came upon them, there was left no room whatever for doubt in their minds. Had it developed in any other manner, these erstwhile Jewish disciples of John the Baptist might have developed some troublesome questions like the converted Jews who witnessed the Gentile Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Spirit coincident with their act of faith in the Son of God (Acts 10:45). These Jews were something of the "gleanings" from the Pentecost harvest.

These Ephesian disciples, so much in the dark, represent any whose hearts have not thrilled to the gentle touch and mighty movements of the Spirit of God.

The dozen in the dark speak of those whose spirits have not cried, "Abba Father"!

The dozen in the dark symbolize those who have never been escorted through the portals of sacred Truth to revel in the beauty and meaning of heavenly revelation.

The dozen in the dark typify any whose hearts lack the security of that Heaven-sent Seal who keeps amid earth's frustrations until the day of redemption.

The dozen in the dark characterize those whose dim eyes have not been opened to contemplate with inexpressible joy the glories which lie beyond the sunset of life's little day.

To meet the Holy Spirit, as these men did, is:

to learn the meaning of His ministry in the practical experience of everyday living;

to measure His movements upon the soul;

to feel His promptings in the heart;

to sense His presence in the life.

To meet the Spirit is:

to yearn for the peaceable fruits of righteousness;

to yield our members in obedience to His gracious directions;

to wait with patience for His renewal of strength;

to hope unto the end with steadfastness.

The whole moral of this lesson and of this entire volume can be summed up tersely: Do not remain in the dark concerning the Holy Spirit. When the Light comes, accept it. When He guides, follow.

06.00.1 The Victory Life in Psalm 119

THE VICTORY LIFE in

PSALM 119 by

S. Franklin Logsdon

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06.00.2 e-Sword Preface

Preface As an e-Sword user, and a resource creator, I always try to find quality works I believe will be beneficial to others in their studies. I hope this fits that description, and that all who use this module will find it to be a blessing. To Dr. David S. Thomason, Ed Sandlin, and Pamela Marshall, Thank You for all of your help in proofscanning, I couldn’t do it without you all. A special thanks to Virgil Butts from Baptist Bible Believers for providing the text. To see this book and many other wonderful Fundamental Christian works, check out his website. http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/ For more great e-Sword modules, visit http://doctordavet.com/index.html. Your Brother In Christ, Jason L. Briggs

06.00.3 Table Of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS 01. THE NEW HORIZON 02. THE SHADOW OF DOUBT 03. HOPE LIES IN THE SKIES

04. GROUNDED 05. THE CRY OF DESPERATION 06. BETTER DAYS ANTICIPATED 07. SPIRITUAL ASSETS 08. THE TRANSFORMING VISION 09. ADVANCEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY 10. THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH 11. SNARES DISCOVERED 12. ASSURANCE AT ITS BEST 13. LOVE’S ENDURING OBJECT 14. THE FLOODLIGHTED PATHWAY 15. THE ZENITH OF SECURITY

06.00.4 Preface

PREFACE

IT IS ON MY HEART to thank my brother, Dr. S. Franklin Logsdon, for what to me is a new and a most unusual approach to a familiar passage of Holy Scripture. That the Lord helped him to discover such an approach is confirmed for me in the fact that, though the Psalm was always a beloved one, it now walks in our streets and breathes human air - its verses have become a person I can see, one whom I know!

For most of us there is no better way to learn a truth than to see it in a life. Example is a far more effective teacher than the voice. The psalmist not only speaks to us, he lets us into the very innermost recesses of his soul. And who does not find his struggle amazingly like the psalmist's?

But is the theme important? Do the experiences have relevance and importance today? There is no more important subject for the child of God. May the testimony of this young man as to his entrance upon the highlands of spiritual living be the means of leading many people into the joys of surrender and of faith - in short, into victorious living.

It is a joy to commend the author, the testimony, and above all, the Lord who is our Victory.

Dr. William Culbertson

President Moody Bible Institute Chicago

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06.01. The New Horizon

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW HORIZON

ALEPH.

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.

Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.

O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!

Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.

I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.

I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly”

(Psalms 119:1-8).

“Blessed are they that keep his testimonies . . . they walk in his ways” (Psalms 119:2-3)

LOOK AT PSALM 119. What are your immediate impressions?

- That it is the longest and most perfect Psalm?

- That it is composed of 22 stanzas, each having 8 verses - 176 in all?

- That it is an alphabetical acrostic, each stanza beginning successively with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet?

- That the Holy Scriptures are referred to in all but three of its verses?

Your observations are quite correct.

But do you not see an individual living in this Psalm? Do you not observe the emotions and movements of a particular entity? In the first four verses, we meet a company of folk, people who have found the better way.

Then, so in keeping with the striking method of the Holy Spirit, a representative case is presented which weaves itself through the remainder of the Psalm with almost dramatic effect.

An unidentified individual, lured Godward by revealed knowledge and presented illustration, is seeking something richer, deeper, fuller. The narrative is both impressive and informative as it progressively unfolds, even strikingly vivid, making this portion of the sacred Scriptures, we

believe, the most comprehensive treatise on the matter of victorious living to be found in the whole of the Bible.

Each of the twenty-two stanzas furnishes in logical sequence a pertinent contribution to the subject.

In the first stanza we note

(1) the examples displayed,

(2) the exhortation discovered, and

(3) the experience desired.

High ideals are always commendable. Lofty ambitions are the hallmark of finer character; but the one who steadfastly desires the best that Heaven can offer to one yet on this earth has reached the apex of better judgment. This is what characterizes the personage in Psalm 119.

An individual emerges in Psalms 119:5. Because of the masculine pronoun in the first person singular and the reference to “young” in Psalms 119:9, we are encouraged toward the conclusion that the case history which we shall pursue is that of a young man.

The possibility of a holy life is established in the early part of the Psalm. Those enjoying it are pointed out for the psalmist’s consideration and encouragement. There they are emblazoned on the horizon of divine revelation. They walked; they sought; they were satisfied. Whatever the formula, it worked!

Now is this way commended to others as being the most gratifying type of life. It is not only commended, it is enjoined upon the believer:

“Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (Psalms 119:4).

This is an authoritative exhortation calling for a practical, personal application.

At once, the psalmist finds himself faced with a challenge. Either the cornea of his spiritual eye will have a sharp tendency to contract with this heavenly light or he will face it squarely. Should he turn from the light, he must wander in darkness. This is ever true.

Jesus said, “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” And further, “Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.”

Robert Louis Stevenson felt that the darkness in the physical realm “passes lightly with its stars and dew and perfumes.”

Not so, however, in the spiritual.

The darkness is dreadful! Nor does it pass lightly. It settles upon the soul of a disobedient one with a depressive weight. The spaciousness of the open world emphasizes the minuteness of one’s little self. Each step seems uncertain, and everything speaks. The stars do not twinkle; they flash rebuke. The dew is not refreshing, nor is the atmosphere perfumed. The soul is plagued with loneliness.

The psalmist has heard God speak. This is certain. And he specifically confirms the communication: “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.”

Two conclusions are apparent.

First, the way of heavenly design is not for a previous age or generation only. It is for all succeeding generations.

Second, the diligent observance of God’s precepts is the means into such a hallowed way and the source of support in it.

This diligence is mandatory. It is enjoined upon the believer and constitutes a very serious personal responsibility.

No amount of reasoning can change the matter.

Arguments about God’s will never bring peace and joy. There is no room for excuse. There is no place for compromise. But why is it so universally difficult to step resolutely into the revealed will of God?

- Why the hesitation to take a way that has such holy prospects?

- Why the reluctance to step decisively into a course so full of happy expectation?

- Why the reticence to pursue a pathway which is luminously studded with golden opportunities?

- Why remain in a way that has been condemned by the high court of Heaven?

In the final analysis (and it does not take long to reach this honest conclusion), it is purely a matter’ of desire.

We do precisely what we want to do.

We go, as a rule, where we want to go. But when the heart wants above all else the sweet will of God, it moves steadfastly in that direction. Nothing can deter it. Finally, in the case before us, the objections begin to cease; the doubts begin to disappear; the pressure of indecision lessens. The answer is on its way!

“O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes” (Psalms 119:5) is the expulsive heart-cry, freighted with convincing earnestness.

This is an eloquent expression of holy desire. It is equally a noble display of fine perception. A challenged life is moving in the right direction.

- Selfish tendencies are halted.

- Willfulness is relaxing.

- Self is giving way to the Spirit.

And when the way of man begins to coincide with the will of God, that one is then entering into a very favorable status. Never forget it; the heart is definitely capable of possessing such a holy longing. The number of people who manifest it is pitifully small. Here is one person who counted

himself one with this blessed minority.

He had doubtless pondered carefully the examples which had been cited in Psalms 119:1-2. Now his admiration for them has grown stronger.

He is convinced that they had made the right choice to walk in the way of the undefiled; that they were shining lights in the orbit of divine approval in their day; that they would continue to shine as the stars forever (Daniel 12:3). They were those who had pleased God. This must now be the aim of his life.

“I shall not be ashamed” (Psalms 119:6), he announces with a distinct timber to his voice.

He is certain he will never regret the decision he has made. How could he be confounded? No one will ever rue the day he turned his life over to the Lord. They only will be ashamed who have failed to do so.

This is alarmingly suggested in John’s epistle:

“And now, little children, abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (1 John 2:28).

We may be absolutely sure the smile of Heaven shines upon those whose hearts are bent upon loving obedience to Him whose we are and whom we serve. This quiet assurance shows itself in the attitudes and actions.

Decision leads to devotion; devotion expresses itself in praise:

“I will praise thee with uprightness of heart,” he pledges, “when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments” (Psalms 119:7).

These righteous judgments about which he desires a fuller knowledge had already invaded his life with a perceptible effect.

- He has moved from the impersonal to the personal,

- He has moved from the general to the specific,

- He has moved from the past to the present,

- He has moved from the objective to the subjective.

Notice the development:

First, “Blessed are they.”

Then, “Thou hast commanded us.” Now, “O that my ways were directed.”

Too long have some of us failed to see the practical, personal aspect of divine instruction - how the Holy Spirit deals with the individual. The psalmist is at grips with God. It is manifested in his emotional outcries and in his actions. His theme song is, in essence, My heart has no desire to stay

Where doubts arise and fears dismay;

Though some may dwell where these abound,

My aim, my prayer, is higher ground.

The venture has begun. Now the movement of his soul is upward, definitely upward, in spite of manifold hindrances and stubborn opposition. We are reminded of the poet, who, in a moment of wishful thinking, said: “If we could draw the curtain which surrounds each other’s life; see the naked heart and spirit . . .”

This is precisely what is done for us so clearly in this Psalm.

The curtain has been drawn, and:

- We see the heart of an individual.

- We observe the emotional surges of his soul.

- We detect something of the longing of his heart.

- We rise in approval of his holy intentions.

- We bow in reverence at his sincere petitions.

- We witness with a sympathetic concern his unnecessary plunges into dismay.

Then, at last, we rejoice with him in the discovery of gladness in the victory which he gains. We share his surprise that the simple principle of spiritual reality was so long unrecognized.

How very helpful it is to have such an impressive array of examples in the opening verses of the Psalm!

How simply they are introduced! They were actual entities, people of like passions to people of all ages. But they knew the joy of walking with the Lord.

Why are they pronounced “blessed”?

Why? because they sought the Lord “with the whole heart.”

Half-heartedness could never be lauded in a heavenly announcement. The true standing, state and practice of the believer are suggested in the very first verse.

Let us note the chief value of these actual examples. If some have enjoyed such a rich spiritual status, then others likewise may have the same experience and the same accompanying blessing. The possibility is established.

The narrow way which leads to life, and eventually to the Homeland of glory, has felt the tread of countless feet. But those noble souls who have longed after God as the deer pants after the waterbrooks have left a deeper imprint.

Some of them have walked through fire and blood. Lashed to the stake, locked in the dungeon, lifted to the cross - these are but a few of the more difficult tests of devotion for many of the unfaltering stalwarts. Others, of course, were just as steadfast along a more tranquil pathway of equal devotion. It was such examples which arrested the attention and captivated the heart of the

young man of Psalm 119.

When or where this vision came before his attention may not be important. Neither are the unmentioned circumstances which led up to it. But there are certain facts which are significant:

First, the experience of life on a higher plane is not only possible, but proved.

Second, it is evident that this kind of living results in the blessing of the Lord.

Third, the challenge involved is sufficiently strong to become a consuming passion in the soul of man.

Who would not be impressed with God-approved men and women?

- We revere the venerable Paul for his utter self-effacement and for his reckless abandon of personal comfort.

- We highly appreciate the pining heart of William Carey as he turned from his shoe cobbling to his quest for souls.

- We honor the memory of David Livingstone who willingly faced the rigors of pioneer missionary life.

- We tenderly regard the act of C. T. Studd in dispossessing himself of wealth in exchange for hardship indescribable as he sought the salvation of pagan men.

But let us be reminded that these mentioned luminaries in the orb of Christian dedication, together with their kind in every age, were no more specifically or directly called to sacrificial devotion than we are.

“Thou hast commanded us,” the psalmist reminds himself as he is stirred to a new sense of responsibility. He observes that it is not merely a suggestion that God’s people walk the way of the undefiled, or a casually extended invitation to be a holy people.

It is definitely and decidedly a command.

To ignore it is a serious offense against the Most High. When God speaks, there is no alternative but to disobey, and disobedience is rebellion.

The psalmist came to the crossroads. He finds, as so many will testify, that one becomes prone to rationalize when the Holy Spirit seeks to turn the feet into the path of spiritual victory. The unconquered ego is amazingly successful in coming up with subtle objections.

God’s way is one; man’s way is another.

We either submit to God’s way, or we persist in man’s way, although we have our own adaptations. Wittingly or unwittingly, we develop a format for our lives; we insist upon a certain procedure; we nurture cherished ambitions. The very thought of forsaking a self-designed and self-satisfying course is most unwelcome, sometimes alarming.

A decision must be made. This is prerequisite!

And what Christian has not found himself in such a crisis. It is then that self is likely to make excuse. It will attempt to appease the conscience with vindictive counter-considerations. With the psalmist, indecision, indefiniteness, and indifference have given way to an honest proof of righteous sincerity.

It is interesting and informative to trace the footsteps of this seeker of God's favor.

The course ahead is not to be flower-strewn, as later experiences will reveal. But he is resolved to take the way of the faithful, the way of the undefiled, the way of those who have sought the Lord with all their hearts. His discernment will not always be the most admirable; his frequent outbursts of discouragement are far from exemplary; but his persistence, holy zeal and firm adherence to the Scriptures, propel him down the trail of triumph.

The testimony of this young man constitutes a compelling challenge to every one who would live godly in Christ Jesus and would know the victory of an overcoming life.

O souls that are seeking for pleasure,

Your follies and pleasures pursue;

Content with the prizes of fortune

This world is now offering to you. But mine is a nobler ambition,

I seek for a richer reward;

I want to be Christlike and holy-

I want to be more like my Lord.

~ end of chapter 1 ~

06.02. The Shadow Of Doubt

CHAPTER TWO

THE SHADOW OF DOUBT

BETH

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.

With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.

With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.

I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

I will delight myself in thy statutes:

I will not forget thy word” (Psalms 119:9-16).

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?” (Psalms 119:9).

LIFE IS NEVER SO EARNEST or so real as when one has had a vision of a closer walk with God.

But while vision is the prerequisite to victory of this sort, it is by no means the guarantee. The murmuring and repining Israelites saw the Promised Land from afar without entering. They envisioned giants of such colossal proportions that they themselves were dwarfed to the size of grasshoppers in comparison. What hideous monsters the devil can parade before the imagination of men!

How many fearful hearts have been intimidated thereby!

The psalmist looks up. The highlands of spiritual living are inviting to his awakened soul, but the heights seem so prohibitive. “If such a holy estate is possible,” he seems to be reasoning, “is it probable that I shall enter into it?”

Pondering the probability is a logical sequence to his stated desire. He is well aware of his faults, his habits, his sins. They stand out in bold relief on the screen of his conscience. Then there is the consideration of companions who will not share such an outlook. Old ambitions, too, loom demandingly. These are, conceivably, his disturbing problems as the new morning dawns.

The day after a spiritual victory is a serious period.

Elijah one day withstood a company of Baal's prophets; the next day, he fled from Jezebel. He was resplendent with unwavering faith on Mt. Carmel calling down fire from Heaven; later, he was pathetic in his despondency beneath a juniper tree. Satan will ever attempt to offset spiritual gains. The author of confusion will do his utmost to frustrate the mind and heart of the one who has tasted victory in the Lord.

Again the psalmist looks at the examples portrayed.

If he bears any remote likeness to us, he would reason that their temperament must have been more conducive to a holy life. Perhaps they did not have to disentangle themselves from so many unspiritual enterprises. What a subtle type of self-pity!

We all are prone to think that others were never called upon to endure the same difficulties which confront us. Our pains and misfortunes are more severe; our obstacles more forbidding; our distances longer. "All thy billows and thy waves are passed over me" Jonah moaned.

Last night's decision meets its real test today.

Now we will discover whether the psalmist meant it when he stated his desire, above all else, to be directed of the Lord. Was he really sincere?

One full look at this young man and our questions are satisfactorily answered. He meant it indeed. We get the impression that he is rolling up his sleeves, clenching his fists, ready to bend and break every circumstance to fulfill his heart's desire. Of course, he errs in method, but he is firm in determination.

He seems to feel he must move out on the field of conquest and strive for victory.

It is a common type of forgetfulness that the battle of a believer is not his but the Lord's.

- Jehoshaphat could have spared himself much mental anguish and untold heart concern had he been aware of this fact.

- Peter could have negotiated the full distance in walking on the water had he kept his eyes on the Lord.

- The terrified sailors in the Galilean tempest preferred at length to bail out the water rather than seek the assistance of the Christ.

Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing." Desperation is the best agent to prove this fact.

Our friend is a realist.

With one sweeping inventory of his attitudes and actions - a diagnosis of his conduct - he asks, in substance, "How can sufficient change be wrought in my life to put me on a plane with those who walk uprightly in the path of holiness?"

It is an age-long question. Nicodemus, in his midnight interview with the Lord relative to the new birth, exclaimed, "How can these things be?"

But the question, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" is timely and pertinent.

Until it is answered intelligently, satisfactorily, scripturally, the holiest longing in the breast of man will be dashed to the earth and all the demons of hell will have a holiday of glee over the defeat.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?”

Is there an answer? There is! It is a mark of spiritual immaturity and blind leadership to dismiss the question with the flat assertion that no one can cleanse his way.

Paul strongly exhorted, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

A man, young or older, may cleanse his way “by taking heed thereto according to thy [God’s] word” (Psalms 119:9).

The spiritual life (and the moral with it) is kept clean by the washing of the water by the Word (Ephesians 5:26). There is no other means. The examples of the holy life (Psalms 119:1-2) had no other means of realizing their joyful experience of walking with the Lord.

Enoch walked and talked with God.

He was a man of faith, and faith is taking God at His Word. In no other way can one get along with the Lord, The redemptive program is creative, corrective and constructive. It is also purgative. Wayward tendencies, evil desires, unholy scheming and unscriptural activities must be corrected if the new man created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Ephesians 2:10) is to know life on the higher plane.

Purging induces the correction and makes it possible.

“O let me not wander!” (Psalms 119:10) is the cry which follows in rapid succession.

The psalmist’s head is bowed. He has looked once again at the godly examples (Psalms 119:1-2) marching fearlessly and unwaveringly down the pathway of devotion.

His heart is with them but his mind is dubious. Yet, a holy walk is possible. Of this fact he is assured, though the probability for him seems very faint indeed. He knows the tendency of his feet. He is none the less earnest. His desire is not lessening. The difficulty lies in the fact that he is visualizing victory in the light of his own will power. For the moment, he is not encouraged. He fears that he will fail.

But who had called him? Who was it that wanted his obedience, his devotion, his love? Whose word is it which offers cleansing? Ah, his slipping feet are arrested. His thoughts turn heavenward.

“Blessed are thou, O Lord” (Psalms 119:12), he quickly affirms.

The light of desire is still burning. Hope can never perish when one is praising the Lord. The heart cannot faint when it is pouring the fragrance of love into the hearing ear of the infinite God. Let there be apparent mistakes and gross shortcomings in the life, one is on hopeful ground who praises God from whom all blessings flow.

His praise is accompanied with a request to be taught.

And what may be said about the willingness of the Lord to grant such instruction?

“Come ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (Psalms 34:11).

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me” (Matthew 11:29).

What possibilities for believers! What avenues of usefulness! What wholesome enjoyment!

According to Psalms 119:13, the psalmist had made some attempt to declare the Truth of God. Now he expresses a hope that he may increase his ability and extend his usefulness. Anyone of us will be quick to conjecture that his doubt will soon be dissipated.

It is fortunate that the psalmist was cognizant of his weakness. It is not amiss for him to confess his proneness to wander. It proves that he is facing facts.

It also proves that he is concerned. Such concern, when once it grips the heart, demands help. Such help is always available.

Among the golden promises from Heaven are these: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him . . . in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct their paths.”

When we hear this suppliant say, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalms 119:11), we would like to steal up to his side and whisper in his ear that yesterday’s faith will not win today’s battles.

You will of course observe the tense of the verb.

Because on one yesterday he had hid God’s Word in his heart, and because today he finds uncleanness in his life and a proneness to wander from the divine precepts, is he unwittingly questioning the power of the Scriptures? Did he believe he could take something of a shortcut to spiritual victory? Did he think that by one past act he had become immunized from sin once for all?

Why does he not reveal a present, continuous practice, especially since he has now such a pronounced longing to be holy? In this moment of heart searching he reveals, among other things, a past act and a present condition. He had hid God’s Word in his heart; he is in need of cleansing. He wants to know how he can rightly and successfully dissociate himself from unspiritual companions and from pursuits which are inappropriate for one bent upon a walk with God.

It is in the nature of man to try to drive bargains with the Lord.

Children in the home often think they have a better way, some faster method, some more acceptable course than that contained in parental instruction. The children of God have something of the same trait. But the command is clear. The Scriptures are to be heeded. This is a day by day application, a moment by moment obedience. The manna was sent down to the Israelites daily. They were obliged to gather it daily. Divine compassions are new every morning because we need daily renewing.

Pottery may assume some grotesque characteristics while in the process of molding, but with each turn of the wheel or with each application of the tool, shapeliness becomes more and more evident. And never doubt the divine Potter. One who submits to Him as the clay will find the Hands of Perfection ever adding touches which will produce a vessel sanctified and meet for the Master’s

use.

Now take a look at our struggling psalmist. There is a change both in attitude and outlook. The last two verses of stanza two contain four “I wills.” These are expressed with studied exactness and with sanctified determination. “I will meditate in thy precepts . . . I will have respect unto thy ways . . . I will delight myself in thy statutes . . . I will not forget thy word.”

What an impressive combination of wholesome promises. They reveal consideration, respect, pleasure and remembrance - all with regard to the Word of God. If there was any confusion of thought, any misunderstanding of basic principles, any divergent leaning, or any unwillingness to comply, every trace of it is absent in these remarkable utterances. It would seem that the adversary is retreating and the seeker of higher ground is gaining altitude. At least, the emphasis is better; the probability brighter.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

Chapter 102

06.03. Hope Lies In The Skies

CHAPTER THREE

HOPE LIES IN THE SKIES

GIMEL

“Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

“I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.

Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments. Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.

Princes also did sit and speak against me: but thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.

“Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors” (Psalms 119:17-24)

“Deal bountifully with thy servant” (Psalms 119:17) THE PSALMIST IS METHODICAL. His petitions sound as though he had spent some time at a drafting board, charting in careful detail his major necessities. We come upon him now in the act of prayer.

He had taken two steps in the right direction. Having heard a pointed appeal, supported by convincing examples, he made it known that there was only one worthwhile way of living as far as he was concerned.

He vowed that he would henceforth walk with God.

Then, raising some honest and pertinent questions about his need of cleansing, and confessing his fear of wandering, he agreed in his heart to respect the Word of Truth and delight himself in its teachings. He concurs with Jeremiah.

“It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” He must seek guidance from above.

“Deal bountifully with thy servant” (Psalms 119:17) is his initial supplication.

The need in his life is overwhelming!

The higher plane seems so far beyond his reach. He looks upon his spiritual poverty and knows at once that substantial assistance must come from above if progress is to be made in his new pursuit. In substance, he is saying, “Knowing as I do the weaknesses and wayward tendencies of my emotional being, O Lord, I will require a great amount of spiritual help if I am to rise commensurate with those who fear Thee and daily do Thy will.”

But Heaven welcomes such wholesome heart-cries.

With relaxed confidence, we may be honest with God concerning our true condition. He knows all. Nothing is hid from Him. The more honest, and the more humble we are, the sooner will our prayers be answered.

Such praying indicates realization of the fact that God is both able and willing to deal graciously and abundantly. There is nothing niggardly about the Lord. He gives in full measure, heaped up, pressed down and running over. What is required, He can supply. There is no want to him who walks uprightly. As the “clay” is pliable in the skillful hands of the divine Potter, He will fashion the most uncomely one into a vessel of honor and usefulness.

If Moody in a modest place of merchandising could reach heavenward for sufficient grace to inspire and equip him for a world-wide ministry, then may anyone with the same faith and willingness do likewise. God is no respecter of persons.

The psalmist’s request is not unreasonable. He knew he required liberal attention from Heaven. He simply made his request known. He had not heretofore because he had not asked. Now he asks, and with no hint of selfishness. On the contrary, he gives as his sole reason for the petition a most eloquent explanation - “that I may live, and keep thy word” (Psalms 119:17).

How many of us can match this? Do you wish to see the light of another day? Of living in it? Why? The primary reason most of us desire to live another day is to complete some project, share some event, to love and be loved, or simply to do things. All want to live, but few have ever poured into the ear of God such a holy motive for living as does the psalmist.

If each daybreak could present to this tottering world great companies of Christian people, dedicated to think and determined to act only within the sacred realm of divine instruction, what a momentous impact could be registered!

We could speak in such a commanding manner that Satan would tremble. The populace at large would be impressed with the Christian way of life and would desire it. The righteous would be more than “scarcely saved” (1 Peter 4:18). There are oceans of possibilities for those who. hunger and thirst after righteousness. Jesus said they shall be filled.

The most ready scribe or the most fluent orator would become a beggar for words in reducing to copy or presenting in oral message the fullest meaning of a completely surrendered life.

Noble attempts are made to answer folk who inquire about the subject. Often the words of explanation are like “apples of gold in pictures of silver” - interesting, appealing, challenging! But this singular utterance from the psalmist’s contrite heart is difficult to excel: “That I may live and keep thy word.”

Only the power of God allowed to have its perfect work in a life could possibly bring a person to such a point as this.

We may go forward in meetings, join the most spiritual church, do personal work, and testify freely, but if we do not have the heart longing to keep God’s precepts diligently, we utterly have missed the simple but profound truth of full surrender.

The apostles heard parables, witnessed miracles, and received instruction direct from Him who spake as never man spake, yet Jesus was forced to say indictingly: “As yet they understand not the Scriptures.”

On another occasion, He said with a tinge of grief in His voice, “Why do ye not understand my speech?” There is a sad deficiency in the experience of present-day Christians as well. Empty profession must give way to glowing reality.

As far as we know, this young psalmist had never witnessed a miracle, nor heard a parable on the deeper life, nor had he had an experience as the Emmaus sojourners in a physical contact with the Lord, but he had heard a heaven-sent message. It revealed to him that God blesses those who walk in the way of the undefiled, those who seek the Lord with their whole heart. It stirred his soul and filled his thoughts. It created a hunger and thirst after righteousness.

“Open thou mine eyes,” he continues, further proving his desire to live daily according to the instructions of the Bible.

A friend called us to his home one day to see a mother rabbit and her new little family.

He explained how he had earlier watched the expectant mother pulling white, downy fur from her body with which to make a bed for her offspring. When the little ones arrived, she covered them gently with the furry blanket. Because of unseasonable warmth she then uncovered her babies, and was now in the act of covering them again for the night. As we were watching, our friend asked the simple question: “Who taught the rabbit to do this?”

Why do we not let God tell us what to do daily?

He who put the instinct in the rabbit can give spiritual intelligence to the believer. But our eyes must be opened to see.

The Emmaus disciples required such an operation. Jesus opened the eyes of their understanding.

Subsequent to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and following his submission to the lordship of Christ, “there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith.”

It does not state that he received his sight. It states that he received sight. What sight did he receive? The sight for which our young friend in this Psalm is pleading. Only with such a clear vision is there a new horizon with countless privileges and joys.

The psalmist seeks an insight into and a clear appreciation of the reality of matters which heretofore had been merely superficial declarations. He knows that vision is primary. Where there is no vision the people perish. Where perception is lacking, progress is impeded.

He cannot keep the Word of God who does not possess a clear conception of its practical meanings.

Open eyes are prerequisite to an onward march.

This individual’s eyes were not entirely closed. They were sufficiently open to see the challenging examples of godly folk, the advisability of emulating them, and the tremendous need in his own life.

He was conscious of the fact that something was fundamentally wrong in his own spiritual experience. But his eyes were not sufficiently open to see how he must proceed, to know how one so lacking as he could be triumphant, to understand how he could honor the Lord in a worthy walk. He is reaching, as it were, for the railing on the stairs - for something to assist him with each successive step in his ascent to a higher plane of spiritual living.

Eyes once open, the seeker waits with joyful anticipation to behold wondrous things from out of the Sacred Volume, the only source of light to direct his steps through the dark and confusing wilderness of this world. As another had stated earlier, “Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel.”

In both cases, the speakers were expressing the thought that they were done with the folly of picking a path through the jungle of reason.

And what were the wonderful things he expected to find in God’s Word? Said Henry Ward Beecher:

“There are promises in God’s Word that no man has ever tried to find. There are treasures of gold and silver in it for which man has never taken the pains to dig. . . . No architect ever conceived of such pictures, and carved dishes and statues as adorn its apartments. It contains treasures that silver, and gold and precious stones are not to be mentioned with.”

The prayer continues: “I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me” (Psalms 119:19).

Personal prayers of deep concern, bewilderment and frustration may sound like incoherent, unintelligent, unrelated utterances. Of course, they are intended only for Him who knows the secrets of the heart and who understands when no one else can. Our most sincere petitions occur when the Holy Spirit is interposing Himself on our behalf with sighs too deep for words. In this instance, we will appreciate the importance of the context.

Why did this young man refer to himself as a “stranger in the earth”?

In what sense was he a stranger? When did he become a stranger? He referred to himself as a stranger because of a sudden realization that he was detached from so much which, up to this moment, had occupied his attention and filled his life. He is in the midst of a transition.

He has discarded “the beggarly elements,” to which the Apostle Paul refers, but has not as yet become clothed with the moral excellencies of the Lord. He has “put off the old man with his deeds,” but has not as yet “put on the new.” In modern parlance, he is asking, “Where do I go from here?”

Entering into a closer practical relationship with the Lord automatically cuts one off from some former engagements and even from some former associates. This is not the easiest matter to explain to unspiritual people. It is sometimes painful to part company with friends of long standing, but “how can two walk together except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3)?

Saul of Tarsus had his last contact with most of his compatriots when he met Jesus along the road to Damascus. Nor can we expect that all our pre-Christian friends or former worldly companions will pledge with Ruth, “Whither thou goest, I will go; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my

God.” Sometimes those of one’s own household will not only fail to understand but will criticize sharply. The psalmist is still praying. “Hide not thy commandments from me,” he urgently pleads.

What an unusual supplication! Does he fear that his opened eyes will have withheld from them the very encouragement he must have? Does he think for one moment that God would leave him in darkness without the true Light?

What he apparently, means to convey in his emotional appeal is this: “I have given up all, Lord, to follow Thee. If I do not have Thy wonderful Word, I have nothing. Remember me, therefore, Lord, as others forsake.”

But God’s Word is revealed, not concealed.

He does not hide it from inquiring people. Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth.”

The psalmist has yet to discover that this heavenly revelation is a “lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path.”

His major concern is hinted in Psalms 119:21 “Thou hast rebuked the proud that are cursed, which do err from thy commandments.”

Would his proneness to wander, of which he is conscious (Psalms 119:10), ever result in his departure from the law of the Lord? Would pride in his life ever affect his respect unto the testimonies of God so that divine rebuke must be registered against him. This is what he apparently fears.

He must not be deceived by thinking he can gain spiritual heights in his own strength or understanding. He desires that the Scriptures shall ever be his guiding light.

“My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times” (Psalms 119:20) is one of the psalmist’s most striking confessions.

It is quite difficult to express some of our deeper emotions, but here is a rather successful attempt. Can anyone doubt his sincerity? The terminology employed is exceptional. Job remarked that he esteemed the Word of God more necessary than his daily food, and others have emphasized their love for divine Truth, but here is a statement which pulsates with fervency of desire. Bishop Taylor speaks of it somewhere as “the violence of the desire bursting itself with its fullness into dissolution.”

We speak and read of the heart being broken, but rarely if ever do we refer to the soul in this way. It is a vehement longing. He is saying: “My soul is broken small; it is crushed.”

In the secular realm we would term it an obsession. In the spiritual sphere it is a passionate yearning which cannot be assuaged short of realization. Persecution cannot dull the luster of its fervent appeal. Pain cannot minimize the fullness of the promised blessing. Desertion by friends cannot shift the focus of the affections. Nor can the most treacherous deceiver substitute anything when opened eyes see the awaiting joy.

In spite of his multiplying spiritual qualities, we are reminded again and again that this young man is most human. We will see many weaknesses as the spotlight of Scripture is turned upon him.

Here is one: “Remove from me reproach and contempt” (Psalms 119:22).

Much dross must yet be consumed before the pure gold appears in his life, yet he cries to be removed from the crucible.

However, it is not now the hour for reproach and contempt to be removed. That hour, though drawing near, has not yet arrived. Until Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit, he will buffet and blast the believer. But fear not, little flock, the Lord’s grace is sufficient. He who endured such contradiction of sinners has promised to be with His own until the end of the age.

But notice, please, the chief source of our friend’s disconcerting trials.

“Princes also did sit and speak against me” (Psalms 119:23), he complains.

People in high offices, people of great influence, can always speak with more convincing force. When the disapproval of such is voiced, it carries much weight in the thinking of many.

While it seems inconceivable that a person of moral integrity, especially one in high office, should denounce or discourage one who has declared himself devoted to the Lord, it nevertheless happens.

Perhaps we have here some suggestion why it is true today, as in other days, when a trusting heart sues for higher territory every inch is contested. Satan will deploy his ablest agents along the course of the saint’s dedicated pathway.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

06.04. Grounded

CHAPTER FOUR

GROUNDED

DALETH

“My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word.

I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.

Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.

My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.

I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame.

I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart”

(Psalms 119:25-32).

“My soul cleaveth unto the dust” (Psalms 119:25) THE PSALMIST’S HEART has been challenged, his outlook changed, and his declarations registered. He knows the theory; he has witnessed the examples; he has sought divine assistance. Why is he not now entitled to sing, “I’m pressing on the upward way;

New heights I’m gaining every day”? No reason at all if it is really true. Lyric and life, however, do not always coincide. Poetry is one thing; practice quite another. Advancing with God involves more than signing a card, more than simply responding to a public invitation, more than shedding a few tears over a fruitless experience.

In aeronautical parlance, our friend is now going to “take off.” He is going to soar to higher heights. This will be reality - the experience for which his heart so earnestly longs.

But he does not rise. There is no soaring. There is only breathless disappointment. He faces a sad discovery. The universal hindrance to spiritual advancement looms ominously as he laments: “My soul cleaveth unto the dust” (Psalms 119:25).

Here, wittingly or unwittingly, he puts his finger on the common cause of spiritual defeat. He is more deeply entrenched in willfulness than he knew. His soul is anchored to earthiness. Indeed, he is attached tenaciously despite his stated desire for heavenly things.

Compare, if you will, the testimony of Paul during a similar spiritual struggle:

“To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18).

In every realm there are governing principles and inexorable laws. The engineers know at the drafting board whether or not the plane will fly, or the motor will operate, or the radio will perform. The chemist can guarantee his product if he is sure of his formula. We should never expect to get water from any combination other than two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. For, if certain fixed laws guarantee a desired end, we must abide by and submit to such laws in order to realize our desire.

This same principle operates in the spiritual realm. Yet nowhere else is this basic fact so ignored.

You may say in a moment of ecstasy, “I could walk on air.” Try it. Step out of the second floor window. The waiting earth will painfully mock you for your folly. Feelings cannot alter facts.

A fact cannot be budged. God says, “As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.”

He makes a marked distinction between the holy and the unholy, between that which is of the Spirit and that which is of the flesh.

As soon as Peter discovered he was sinking in the waves, he cried for the Lord to rescue him. As soon as the psalmist discovered he was hindered from rising because of his earthy attachments, he cried for the Lord to quicken him. And we might remind ourselves that in this Psalm he asked nine times to be quickened.

There are nine component parts to the fruit of the Spirit as recorded in Galatians 5. And what is the victorious life but the manifestation of the Spirit in the experience of a Christian. This is what he needed; this is what he sought.

Perhaps the reader will want to protest at this point, saying, “How complicated!” But not so.

Of course, the evil opposer of all that is high and holy would like to perplex us. First, he is determined that men shall not be saved. Then, when one does enter into newness of life, he vows that that one shall not proceed to the point of full enjoyment and usefulness. But God does not complicate the matter. He makes it ever so simple.

To His ancient people, the Lord God said, “This is the way” (Isaiah 30:21). In New Testament times, Jesus said, “I am the way” (John 14:6). To His covenant people, the Lord said, “Walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21), while the Master later simply instructed His own, “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19).

This is reducing profound matters to an irreducible minimum.

There are only two directions in which a child of God can move - forward or backward. To stand still is stagnancy, and stagnancy is death. The Lord bids His people to go onward. For example, in Psalms 55:22, the instruction is, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee, he shall never suffer [He never intended, never purposed] the righteous to be moved [to waver or get off the course].”

We have the same message in Hebrews 12:1 : “Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race which is set before us.”

And again, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world . . . for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”

“He that doeth the will of God.”

Ah! This is putting the whole, big matter into the simplest of terms. We have but One to please, only One to follow, simply One to serve. We need but do His will. And His will is not the elusive something that is neither here nor there when we search for it. No, He that wills to do the will of God shall know the teaching (John 7:17).

The psalmist begins at once to survey the situation. In Psalms 119:27 he admits that he does not really know God’s way, even though he had made a fair display of devotion. And it is a common error to think that the Lord will place His approval upon us and bless us simply because we are adhering to some code of morals, or to some system of ethics, or to some religious exercise, or doing the best we can, while, at the same time, we are not complying with His Word.

Even an athlete argues in vain if his well-executed play is contrary to the book of rules. What God does not authorize, He cannot approve; what he cannot approve, He will not accept.

God can only bless obedience to His will.

The people of Hosea’s day made an impressive display. “Come, and let us return unto the Lord,” they said in something of a concert (Hosea 6:1). The Lord answered at once saying, “Ye have not cried unto me with your hearts.”

It sounded good on earth to hear such professions, but it was totally unacceptable in Heaven.

We now find the psalmist noticeably disturbed about the matter. This is reflected in his humble confession: “My soul melteth for heaviness” (Psalms 119:28).

But how much sorrow does it require for one to come to the helpless end of self?

The Corinthian believers sorrowed unto repentance because, as Paul explained, “Ye were made sorry after a godly manner.” We are convinced that the sorrow in the psalmist’s heart is also after the same manner. It rocked his soul and forced him to search his life for the reasons occasioning defeat.

There was perhaps nothing false about his statements, but there was something inconsistent about his course. Therefore, he entreats the Lord earnestly to “remove from me the way of lying” (Psalms 119:29). This is self-indictment, meaning, “I testify up here (gesturing to show the higher plane), but I live down here (gesturing to show the lower level).”

Perhaps nowhere else in the Scriptures is it more evident that testimony and experience can be so noticeably incompatible. Perhaps nowhere else is it so clearly demonstrated that one’s affections can be so deceptive. The psalmist wants this inconsistency removed, and he knows the only way to remedy the situation is to determine first of all the contributing factors.

The remainder of this stanza finds him thus engaged. On the surface, matters seemed quite in order in his life, but the power of an overcomer is not there.

Some months ago, a friend of the family took us in his private airplane to visit relatives in another city. When we returned to the airport, the pilot made all the necessary arrangements for the take-off. Our seat belts were fastened; the instruments were tested; the starter button was pressed. The propeller began to turn rather lazily. The pilot pumped the choke with one hand and the primer with the other, but the propeller failed to gain momentum. The ignition was turned off, the cabin top pushed back, and the pilot dismounted. He lifted the hood, tested the electrical connections, then checked the carburetor and fuel supply. Returning to his position, he repeated the starting process, but with no better success.

The plane could not be taxied down the runway, much less made to soar into the sky. There was no power.

How illustrative this is of the case at hand, and perhaps of our own case. We claim the holy distinction of being Christians. With a degree of pumping and priming, we go through certain motions, but are we moving down the runway of fruitfulness? Are we gaining altitude in spiritual development? Naturally, steps were taken at once to determine the reason for the lack of power in the plane. And this is precisely what the psalmist begins to do concerning his life.

“I have chosen the way of truth,” he declares with certainty.

There is no question in this regard. This is a fact. He can remember how he was persuaded that God’s way is the best way - indeed the only way for one to pursue with assurance.

He had made this choice. But has not every believer made the same choice? Such a choice, all-important as it is, only starts one on the right course. We must leave the elementary teachings and advance toward maturity. The psalmist here is not so advancing. This, of course, is his chief concern.

“I have stuck unto thy testimonies” (Psalms 119:31), he further observes with careful confidence, meaning, in all probability, that he had never questioned the full inspiration and authority of the Bible. The arguments of skeptics had never shaken his faith in the authenticity of the Scriptures. He had never been swayed by the contention that science disproves certain portions, nor had he ever been affected by the complaint that Genesis is largely mythical - the imaginative composition of Hebrew mystics. He had stuck to the Book.

We today may subscribe to the inspiration of the Scriptures, believing with our whole hearts that the Bible is God’s Word, without advancing toward real victory in Christ.

We would do well to confess with this young man that power is lacking in our lives. We should be ascending to higher heights of spiritual achievement. We should be moving toward greater usefulness. We should know what it means to walk in Christ’s triumphant train (2 Corinthians 2:14). Even though we may have both chosen the way of God’s Truth and have faithfully held that the Scriptures are final in authority, let us not stop here. The question is, Where is the power?

“I will run the way of thy commandments” (Psalms 119:32), he ventures to assure the Lord.

And why does he employ three different words in succession when referring to the Scriptures - “judgments,” “testimonies” and “commandments”?

Why did he use them in this particular order? A coincidence? No, the Holy Spirit moved upon these holy men of old in the production of this precious Volume. We may not always be able to detect it, but there is always a reason. Here, personal decision is made with respect to divine judgments; man’s belief is attached to the Lord’s testimonies; dedicated action is ever governed by sovereign commandments. There must be a careful blending of faith and obedience. We must be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Now the false way of which he was so sorrowfully conscious in Psalms 119:29 is going to be deserted for the course of God’s design.

“I will run the way of thy commandments.”

Nor is it an adopted policy only; it is to be the way of life for him henceforth. He will run in it, so he tells the Lord. He must understand, however, that only “they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). Walking is obligatory; running or mounting is optional. The psalmist chooses to run. But why the qualification - “when thou shalt enlarge my heart”?

Even in those moments of our strongest zeal and abounding devotion, there is always the danger of stopping short of full surrender. It is altogether too natural for one to interject a qualification.

There was that lovely young schoolteacher of our acquaintance who tearfully responded to a public challenge for missionary volunteers. She sobbed out her willingness to go for the Lord anywhere - except to Africa. Many have asserted their willingness to study the Bible more thoroughly if they had the time. Some have said that they would engage in soulwinning if they had more boldness. Others have said they would give testimonies if they were more fluent. How wretchedly deceptive are these hearts of ours (Jeremiah 17:9). They suppress faith and prevent growth.

The carriers of the Ark of the Covenant were willing to step where the Jordan had overflowed, all because God said, “Step!” Perhaps we are fearful of getting our feet wet. We would rather know what is beneath the overflowing water.

This man, and we have no question regarding his sincerity, promised to run in the way of divine commandment if God would enlarge his heart. Let us learn once for all that sovereign commandments are to be obeyed regardless.

The heart may be variously affected. It is said to dilate with joy, contract with sadness, break with sorrow and melt with discouragement. But what is “enlargement”?

If it is accurate to think of the heart as the seat of the affections, is this man asking the Lord to increase his love? Now, who or what increases our love for the Lord and for His way? It is true that love is of God, for God is love. It is also true that the love of God is shed abroad in the heart of a believer by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). But this love must be reflected by us. We must prove it in honoring and obeying the One whose we are and whom we serve. “Lovest thou me?” the resurrected Saviour asked His disciple. He wants some commitment. When a Christian sets his

affections on things above, and not on things on the earth, there will be little doubt about his running in the way of the divine commandments. There will be little hesitation. Such love is quick in its willingness to offer its all. It is bold in its movements on the field of conquest. It can look at difficulties and say, “None of these things move me.” It can stare full-faced into the glittering flash of tempting allurements and firmly declare, “I count not my life dear unto myself.”

With Mr. Moody, it will volunteer with no misgivings, “Send me anywhere, but go with me. Lay upon me any burden, but sustain me. Sever from me any tie but the tie that binds my heart to Thee.”

~ end of chapter 4 ~

06.05. The Cry Of Desperation

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CRY OF DESPERATION

HE

“Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end.

Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea,

I shall observe it with my whole heart.

Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.

Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.

Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear.

Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good.

Behold, I have longed after thy precepts:

Quicken me in thy righteousness” (Psalms 119:33-40).

“Make me to go” (Psalms 119:35)

WE WATCHED A PIGEON FANCIER on a certain occasion as he started some prize birds on a race. The cage was placed in a field and the door of escape was opened by the use of a long string. Rather deliberately the birds came out and flew to nearby objects such as a tree stump or fence post. They looked in one direction, then in another. Soon they took to their wings and moved somewhat in circles for the moment. It was evident they were seeking the right direction. Having been shipped by train a distance of one hundred miles, they had gone through mountain passes, around turns, and through tunnels. They were transported in railroad coach, station truck and auto. But, when they finally got their sense of direction, they were off.

The psalmist does not have too clearly the right sense of direction. He has meandered through many false ideas. Now he seems desperate. He is repetitious in his statements, uncertain in his thinking, and bewildered in his outlook. He reminds one of Job who seemed to be groping in darkness as the burden of his soul forced him to cry out,

“Oh, that I knew where I might find him! that I might come’ even to his seat!” (Job 23:3).

But desperation never imitates. Its outbursts are never premeditated. They are like the release of a safety valve on a pressure tank - abruptly expulsive.

Desperation exceeds impatience in illogical outbursts. Impatience prompted James and John to call for fire from heaven to consume those who showed indifference toward Christ, but desperation led Isaiah to demand that God Himself come down and produce a terrifying phenomenon (Isaiah 64:1-2). Panic destroys reason.

“Make me to go in the path of thy commandments” (Psalms 119:35), the psalmist pleads.

As the hymn writer expressed it, our young friend had “tried in vain a thousand ways his fears to quell, his hopes to raise,” but he had failed. What he thought was so possible of attainment had somehow eluded his grasp. There was no lack of earnestness, but there was a pathetic lack of progress.

Surely his desire is real, but he is failing. His soul is still cleaving to the dust (Psalms 119:25). Now he seems to feel that, if he is going to make progress and know from experience the type of life enjoyed by the examples presented in Psalms 119:1-2, then God must seize him and force him to go in that hallowed way.

“Make me to go!” he appeals.

This is another common illusion which is altogether too general. God says, “Come,” but He does not force. He says, “Go,” but He does not thrust one forward. He could not make one to go in His designed course without forcing all since He is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11).

If He forced all, or any for that matter, where would be the obedience? Where would be the love? The honor?

The divine economy does not call for automatons. The simply stated qualification is, “If any man wills to do his will . . .”

Doubtless the psalmist quickly sensed the immaturity and lack of logic in this petition, even as we become conscious of improper requests which find their way into our prayer utterances. Here is his correction:

“Incline my heart unto thy testimonies” (Psalms 119:36), he hurriedly urges.

In other words, if it is not consonant with God’s will to force him on to victory, and it is not, perhaps the Lord might tilt his affections in that direction. “As the tree bends, so it falls.” Is this another unwitting attempt to drive a bargain with the Almighty? The basic factor in this whole matter, as Paul so aptly explained it to the Colossian believers, is a voluntary fixing or setting of our affections on things that are above and away from things on the earth.

“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity” (Psalms 119:37), he cries in quick succession.

Now we observe that not only is his heart unsettled, but his eyes as well are not steadfastly focused in the right direction. His inferred question is this: “If I arrive on a higher plane or spiritual experience, will I be prone to look down longingly upon the more beggarly elements from which I have been delivered?” This is a trustlessness and may be stated in a dozen ways. The most common rendering today is, How can I hold out?

One thing is sure, victory and vanity cannot coexist. If we are going forward, we will not be going backward. Of course, the condition of the heart and the direction of the eyes make every difference in one's spiritual welfare. Just how vague can we become about matters on which so much hallowed illumination is shed?

We must be convinced that the holy life of walking and talking with God is not the strange enigma which our deceitful hearts would lead us to believe. We must not for one moment permit ourselves to think that the life of victory is divinely offered, and then, as by some invisible cord, subtly snatched from our reach. Never! God does not promise and then retract. He does not offer and then withhold. He does not lead and then disappoint.

We but faintly recall reading somewhere of one who went through an experience similar to that of the person in Psalm 119. This individual had made promise after promise to the Lord, each of which lacked fulfillment. Finally, he determined that such sad failure must cease. "Lord, by six o'clock next Wednesday," he declared, "I will decide once for all whether or not I will yield to Thee wholly." The intervening days were spent largely in fasting and prayer.

As the deadline, which he himself had set arbitrarily, drew near, the inward conflict was most intense. He pleaded for an extension of time, but felt strangely obliged to abide by his own time suggestion. Out of the anguish of his soul, he cried,

"O Lord, self-will has been enthroned for so long that it refuses to abdicate!"

This is materially what the early stanzas of Psalm 119 prove. This is, without question, the cause of spiritual defeat in any life. Our day bears a likeness to the days of the Judges when each did that which was right in his own eyes. We have no true means of determining to what extent earnest Christians are inoculated with this prevailing malady. We have operated and controlled our manner of life for so long that it is surprisingly difficult to turn the control over to Him whose right it is to rule supreme.

"Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes" (Psalms 119:33), he had prayed with an apparently reasonable outlook.

Teaching of course is necessary, indeed indispensable, but why had he not sought it earlier? Even now, why does he not profit more evidently. Surely the outbursts of this stanza are not indicative of being divinely taught.

The Apostle Paul hit the nail on the head when he said, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge [experience] of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). He was referring to those who handle but fail to apply the message of the Bible - those who deny themselves the power and privilege of richer things; those who go on with a mere form of godliness.

One commendable fact about the psalmist, however, is his utter abhorrence of defeat.

He tells the Lord that, if he is taught in the way of the divine Statutes, he is determined to "keep it to the end" (Psalms 119:33). And what end did he have in mind? Obviously the end of his life's journey. This is without doubt the proper outlook. It is the language of true conviction. It has many involvements, but there are marvelous compensations.

Standing by one's convictions means to maintain an uncompromising attitude with regard to that which is divinely approved.

- It is a firm refusal to turn from the paths of orthodoxy.

- It is an avowed adherence to the precepts and principles of God's revealed Word.

- It is that kind of spiritual stamina which is able to withstand vicious attacks.

- It is a definite stalwartness of character which remains unaffected in the midst of detracting influences.

- It is that strength of soul which shows no tendency toward surrender of holy ideals.

- It is a determination to press on when others are falling by the wayside.

- It is devotion that maintains its warmth when the spiritual temperature round about is dropping.

- It is a vision which continues its focus upon the coveted goal.

- It is a steadfastness which survives the current epidemic of indifference.

- It is purpose in its faithful display of resoluteness.

Now, it seems that the psalmist's version of his failure to date is attributable to lack of proper instruction. He feels that, if he can receive such instruction from the Lord, the outcome will be both favorable and permanent.

This should be the least of his concern, and the least of ours as well.

The Lord is ever willing to teach us the way. Indeed, He has given copious instructions.

"What more can He say than to you He hath said,

To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

It was David who assured, "Thou wilt show me the path of life" (Psalms 16:11). God will show anyone who has the desire to be shown and the willingness to obey.

The petition for instruction is followed immediately by the request for understanding (Psalms 119:34).

This is quite in order, for it requires understanding to distinguish between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God, between being wise in one's own conceits and wise in the things of the Spirit.

"Wisdom is the principal thing," the great Solomon emphasized, "therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7).

If worldly wisdom is practical moral intelligence, then godly wisdom is practical spiritual intelligence, and understanding is the appreciation of its value and utility.

If knowledge acquired in less mature days were crowned with understanding in advancing years, there would be more able servants in the field of Christian enterprise and more spiritual victors in

the conquests of righteousness.

Even though the psalmist in this stanza has stopped short of realizing his heart's desire, it is pleasing indeed to hear him, pledge, if and when he is taught in the way of the Lord and has acquired understanding of it, "I shall observe it with my whole heart" (Psalms 119:34).

When the whole heart can be rallied to the devotion of the Lord, that is victory. That is life on the higher plane.

Some day it will become clear:

- How many times we prayed to the point of receiving an answer, then ceased without realizing the fulfillment of our petitions;

- How many times we almost earned a reward, then became weary in well-doing;

- How many times we almost won a soul to Christ, then gave up;

- How many times we were on the threshold of victory, then wavered.

To know so much and to enjoy so little is pathetic in the extreme. Yet this is the prevailing situation. How very patient the Holy Spirit must be!

One was heard to say recently concerning the diaries of Robert Murray McCheyne and David Brainerd,

"If the Christian life entails as much misery as is expressed" in these personal writings, I can readily understand why there are so few real Christians. Misery? It is always a miserable thing to deal with sin in this life, because sin is miserable, and leads to miserable ends.

- He who sues for victory in Christ must know that every inch will be contested.

- He who would be crucified with Christ, like Paul, must be acquainted with the fact that it is a painful procedure.

- He who strives for the mastery must face the possibility of severe denial.

- He who would mount up on wings as the eagles in spiritual development must expect great opposition.

The adversary loses one battle when the individual is delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13).

He is loath to lose again in letting that one rise from spiritual immaturity into spiritual strength, from a nominal status to a glorious experience. Hence the struggle. The spirit wars against the flesh (self) and the flesh wars against the spirit. Discomfort is expected in warfare; wounds often result; and in spiritual conquest, we face a vicious and treacherous foe.

We would not wittingly infer that by some battle waged and by some victory gained the individual has lifted himself to the higher plane of Christian experience. That would be grossly misleading. No, in this respect, as in all others, without Christ one can do nothing - absolutely nothing that counts in Heaven.

The real victory comes not by struggle, but by surrender; and it is this surrender which constitutes the towering problem for the average person.

That full willingness to let go and let God have His way in the life is the very last move anyone is disposed to make.

The reader must conclude, with the facts in hand, that the young man of Psalm 119 is engaging in a real conflict.

- He is not suffering from hallucinations.

- He is of a sound mind.

- He is not visionary.

- He is a realist.

- He knows what he desires.

- He is assured of its attainment.

One fact is burning its way into his soul: “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart” (Psalms 119:2).

~ end of chapter 5 ~

06.06. Better Days Anticipated

CHAPTER SIX

BETTER DAYS ANTICIPATED

VAU

“Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word.

So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.

So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.

And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.

I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved;

and I will meditate in thy statutes” (Psalms 119:41-48).

“I will walk at liberty . . . I will delight myself in thy commandments” (Psalms 119:45, Psalms 119:47). THE TURBULENCE HAS SUBSIDED. The high tide of soul distress has ebbed out to sea. Now, with a more tranquil poise, the psalmist does not want God to force him to go in the way of holy living. Neither is he now asking the Lord to bend his affections in that direction. More sober thinking always revises desperate exclamations.

As we observe him now we gain the impression that he is regathering his forces, as it were, for a new thrust against the enemy who is preventing him from rising to a higher plane of spiritual enjoyment. We have an urge to tell him that he is his own worst enemy. Perhaps we would tell him, but for one reason - we ourselves resent being told the same needful truth.

“Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord” (Psalms 119:41), he appeals.

Does this not remind us of the pleas of the limping church today as revival is sought?

Everywhere among Christians, we hear the cry, “We are desperately in need of revival!” Almost every religious periodical of a strong biblical emphasis takes up the cry.

Even our national leaders, surprisingly enough, are sounding the same imperative. Thinking people throughout Christendom are aware of a spiritual deterioration. “Bless us! Bless us!” we plead individually and collectively. More and more we stand at the wailing wall.

What are these “mercies” for which the psalmist is entreating?

Does the “also” in his petition indicate a demand for what others have received? He had been indiscreet earlier in demanding that God force him to be victorious in his spiritual endeavors. Perhaps he does not realize that he is still rather indefinite. How simple it is to be specific in our prayers and in our confessions. Yet we seldom are. If we were more childlike in our faith, we would be more pointed in our prayers. When a youngster desires a cookie, he asks for it. If he wants bread and jam, that is what he requests.

“I don’t know how to pray. What I have been doing is not prayer,” a man bluntly confessed following a midweek meeting.

“What have you been doing?” we inquired sympathetically.

“Well, it amounts to this,” he replied rather shamefully. “I have been saying, in effect, ‘O Lord, here is my calling card. On it you will find my name and address. Please send me your blessings.’”

This is an indicting confession, and may be representative of the meaningless supplications of great numbers of people. We know of those who, in later years, thanked God for not granting some of their foolish earlier requests. But that was not all to this particular appeal of the psalmist. He added, “even thy salvation.”

The word “even,” being in italics, was supplied by the translators. If this is the correct word, then the blessings which he desires and requests have to do with salvation. However, it seems evident that this second part is not used in apposition, but rather as an additional petition, for the word “salvation” here means deliverance.

The mercies or blessings which he desires are those which accompany true victory, the kind enjoyed by the triumphant examples about which he had previously heard.

The deliverance, on the other hand, which he seeks is perhaps the same which he requested in Psalms 119:22 and Psalms 119:39 - freedom from the reproach and contempt heaped upon those who steadfastly pursue the path of faithful dedication.

Anyone would delight in the blessings; few are willing to accept the reproach.

Must I be carried to the skies On flowery beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize

And sailed through bloody seas?

Three times in our generation, we have seen sturdy young men leaving their homes, their loved ones and all cherished interests to engage in gruesome war. They slept in ditches, crawled in mud, suffered with the cold, saw arms and limbs torn with shrapnel and shell, and languished as captives in the hands of heartless enemies.

Is there not comparable bravery among the soldiers of Jesus Christ? If men can suffer for their country, cannot men suffer, if need be, for Christ? Their valor has been proved to us in the secular realm; has our valor been proved to them in the sacred realm? Young people have waited long, dreadfully long, and with such pathetic disappointment, for adults to be examples of the godly challenge.

The desire for a holy life began in the heart of the young psalmist when he saw others walking in the way of the undefiled.

At the moment, however, he finds no defense when his critics speak against him (Psalms 119:42). His situation, he reasons, would be more favorable were he free of reproach. He thinks he could then better refute the taunts of his persecutors. If all were well, in his opinion, his testimony would carry more weight - it would be more convincing that God was with him.

The Lord Jesus has prepared His followers in this regard:

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven . . . take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

These are lessons to learn well.

“Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth” (Psalms 119:43), he begs of the Lord.

It is clear that he wants to maintain a witness. He wants to speak for the Lord. But his effectual witnessing is limited due to his lack of spiritual development. How far can a weakling get in attempting to prove to another the manifold grace of God? What success would such a one have in bombarding the ramparts of Satan?

We have a friend who expended much energy in defending his right as a Christian to smoke cigarettes. He argued often when nobody was even disposed to question his habit. One day, he testified “The cigarettes are gone. I guess they wouldn’t have kept me out of Heaven, but they surely were closing my lips here. I couldn’t witness.”

The psalmist must know that God does not close the lips of a witness; it is the personal conduct which curtails testimony.

Now comes a new attempt on his part to assure the Lord that he means business. Here is an impressive series of promises. It does not seem clear that God exacts or expects promises from His people. He does not say in His dealings, “Will you first promise Me?” But it is common for Christians to volunteer such pledges as: “If you will raise me up from this affliction or sickness, I will go where you want me to go and do what you want me to do.”

“I will walk at liberty” (Psalms 119:45), he tells the Lord.

Here is an impressive promise to witness widely, for in the next verse he adds, “I will speak thy testimonies also before kings.”

This is a noble attitude. There are times when others of us feel that nothing is too difficult to undertake for our blessed Saviour. But good intentions frequently fail to reach the point of fulfillment. Time after time, throngs of wholesome young people have responded to the missionary challenge in our Bible school chapels, in church missionary conventions, at Bible conferences and Christian camps. Yet reliable statistics give us this grim account. Only twelve out of one hundred apply for training; five out of one hundred complete their Bible training; three out of one hundred qualify for service: and only one out of one hundred returns to the field for the second term.

Any reasonable person must readily admit that some fearful force militates against these volunteers. Were they only pretending when, with moistened eyes, they walked the aisle as an awed and sympathetic congregation sang, “Where He leads me, I will follow”? Of course, it was not mere pretense! Perhaps, without exception, they were never more serious in their lives. What happened to the vast majority of them? They simply did not make the grade. Why?

Only a few days ago a man; who, at an earlier age, felt definitely called to the Christian ministry, said, “A red herring crossed my path somewhere along the line.” By this, of course, he meant that his attention had been diverted. But why should a red herring hinder a person from obeying orders from Heaven?

First, this young psalmist said, “I will mount,” but his soul cleaving to the dust prevented him from mounting. Then, he assured himself, “I will run,” but he could not quicken his pace. Now, he declares, “I will walk” (Psalms 119:45). It may not have been a red herring in his case. It may have been, rather, the “little foxes which spoil the vine.”

One thing is sure, at this particular juncture he is not making much progress. The future tense in his statements proves this. He is still deferring obedience and action. There is also another hint which might explain his lack of progress. In promising to speak before kings, he adds, “I will not be ashamed” (Psalms 119:46). Is this indirectly a confession that he has been ashamed to speak?

“I will delight myself in thy commandments” (Psalms 119:47), he continues.

If this promise is fulfilled in his life, he should quickly escape from his disturbing disappointment.

You will recall that this young man had testified about former joys when he said, “I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies” (Psalms 119:14).

Thus, we have his former record and his future plan.

Rejoicing in the divine testimonies is not sufficient; he must delight in the commandments as well. God tells us what He has done, and what a wonderful revelation it is. He also tells us what He wants us to do. If we love the account of His goodness, we should have the same affection for His wise directives.

The very last glimpse of the psalmist in this stanza is rather dramatic. “My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments” (Psalms 119:48), he pledges with solemn heart.

As a rule, lifted hands have to do with prayer of the most serious nature. For instance, “I rose up from my heaviness and having rent my garments and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God” (Ezra 9:5).

Solomon employed the same gesture in his famous prayer at the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:12).

Perhaps the outstretched hands of the psalmist carry an added suggestion. They are the outreach of willingness, the symbol of readiness. With Samuel he is saying, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” With Isaiah, he is volunteering, “Here am I, send me.”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

06.07. Spiritual Assets

CHAPTER SEVEN

SPIRITUAL ASSETS

ZAIN

“Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.

This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.

The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.

I remembered thy judgments of old, O LORD; and have comforted myself.

Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law.

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

I have remembered thy name, O LORD, in the night, and have kept thy law.

This I had, because I kept thy precepts” (Psalms 119:49-56)

“This I had” (Psalms 119:56).

IT IS INVENTORY TIME. All clear-thinking people, at certain intervals, take note of their possessions and accomplishments. Unless stark poverty has moved into one’s economic realm or grim disaster into one’s activities, each one can say, “This is what I have.” Be the items ever so few and their value ever so slight, one may say, “This is what I have.”

But what is the reader’s inventory in the sphere where values are eternal? What do you have?

The difference between what God provides and what we possess should produce an incentive to press on - ever on!

Every Christian leader should urge the believer to possess his possessions. Observe how the inimitable Moses, meek but mighty, sought to wave his people down the home-stretch to victory.

“Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee,” he appealed, “go up and possess it!”

But neither under his leadership nor under that of his successor did the people manifest much disposition to press on. As Joshua’s day of faithful service was ebbing to its close, the Lord had this to say, “Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet much land to be possessed.”

Returning to the writer of Psalm 119, we find him in a very pensive mood. He is engaged in some serious calculations. At the moment, he is completing a delineation of acquirements. The line is drawn, as it were, and the total is to be discovered.

“This I had” (Psalms 119:56), he says, meditatively.

And what is the subject of his consideration? His spiritual blessings. He is attempting to prove to himself that, in spite of his failure to rise to the desired heights, it has not all been loss. He is sure he has made some gains through the years. But what does the tabulation reveal? We shall notice for ourselves beginning with the opening verse of the stanza.

“Thou hast caused me to hope” (Psalms 119:49), he maintains.

To begin with, he had hope.

Love may be more highly evaluated than hope in Paul’s classical dissertation of I Corinthians 13, but hope, with faith, is one of the abiding assets in the breast of a believing person. Man is a migrant. The most unusual changes come upon him suddenly and when he least expects. Definite programs are smashed by hands we never see.

We need hope to face the uncertainties of life. We must have hope to spur us on. Fainting hearts result from the absence of hope, or from the disillusioning let-down of false hope. Yes, he had hope. He is glad to list it in his spiritual inventory. But does not the weakest believer have hope? Hope, in itself, is not enough.

“This is my comfort” (Psalms 119:50), he adds next in the list.

He has comfort, too.

He needs comfort as well as hope. Who does not require comfort? When Jesus saw the saddened disciples in heaviness of heart just prior to His death, He explained that it was to their advantage that He depart in order that the Comforter might come - the One who would be with them always!

Always? Yes, for we shall ever require comfort. As a new and necessary message for the prophet, God instructed Isaiah to “comfort ye, comfort ye my people,” at the same time assuring His servant, “It is I, even I, that comforteth thee.”

The Lord is the source of all comfort as He is the source of all grace, “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.”

While the psalmist does not reveal the nature of his affliction (Psalms 119:50), he nevertheless gives us to understand that he has been subjected to severe trial. This, of course, is not surprising. Let anyone, especially a youth, serve notice against Satan that there must be a definite, once-for-all cleavage between them, that the course of righteousness is to be followed henceforth, and the wicked adversary who hindered Paul will at once begin to make the going rough indeed. But witness carefully what gives this youthful person the stamina to press on. It is not the “breakfast of champions” which children hear about today, but rather the heavenly food of overcomers.

“Thy word hath quickened me” (Psalms 119:50), he testifies.

This wonderful Word of Truth which is forever settled in Heaven has lost none of its sustaining power. It can enliven today. It can stimulate and sustain regardless of the tests.

“The proud have had me greatly in derision” (Psalms 119:51), he confesses.

Notice the tense of the verb. He has survived some distressing experiences. The word “greatly” suggests this fact. The mockery and scorn to which he had been subjected pressed him beyond measure. His tempters were cruel; their schemes were wicked; but amid it all he did not renounce God’s Word.

“I have not declined from thy law” (Psalms 119:51), he rigidly insists.

It is possible, you know, for a pugilist to have swollen eyes, bleeding nose and bruised flesh, yet emerge from the ring a champion. Never fear the wounds which might be sustained in a conflict with the Devil. The victory is all the sweeter if it entails some hardship. Paul gladly and willingly bore about in his body the marks (stigma) of the Saviour, and rendered thanks unto “God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“I remember thy judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself” (Psalms 119:52), is the psalmist’s prayerful affirmation.

When did he comfort himself in this manner? Apparently when the proud had him in derision - in his times of testing. What could possibly encourage one more than a remembrance of the Word of God in any hour of desperate need?

When Alice of Cranbrook was cast into the dark dungeon for her devotion to the Lord and to His Truth, her recorded trials are almost imponderable. Dense darkness, dampness, creeping things, weird sounds, scant unpalatable food, little water - these were but a few of the terrifying circumstances thrust upon her.

Almost incessantly, her persecutors called upon her to recant. Like the brainwashing of modern brutality, such tormenting bore heavily upon her physical and mental reserves. At her weakest moment, she remembered Psalms 42:11 : “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him.”

Few people have learned experientially the encouraging force of this wonderful, wonderful Book which we joyfully call the Bible.

“Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law” (Psalms 119:53), he explains.

He had deep concern for others. This is compassion. A casual glance at the first six words in this statement would give us the impression that he is the victim of a terrible plight, but not so. He reveals why he is seized with horror. He is thinking of others.

- What do they do in perplexing circumstances?

- What do they do in time of deep sorrow?

- What will they do when the icy arm of death reaches forth inevitably to snatch them away?

He has compassion for them. When one begins to consider others with such concern of heart, one is forgetting self. He is moving in a good direction, for Whoso bears another’s burden;

Whoso shares another’s woe;

Brings his frankincense to Jesus With the men of long ago.

What is going to be the end of those who forsake the Word of God? Does it not concern us? How much do we feel a burden for the unbeliever?

If our eyes were sufficiently open to see the interminable stream of humanity pouring into the dark abyss of a lost eternity, surely horror would lay hold upon us too. If we could look into this young man's mind, perhaps we might discover that part of this seizure of horror is attributable to a recollection of his own neglect of God's Word in days gone by.

At any rate, he manifests concern for others. We hope that someone was or is concerned about you who read these lines.

We come now to a rather melodious note. We learn for the first time that this individual is a singer. At least, he makes reference to singing.

"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (Psalms 119:54), his notation reads.

This world to the believer is only the place of his pilgrimage. How blessed to sing enroute through the wilderness to that Home eternal in the heavens where singing gladdens the atmosphere endlessly!

That will be a Home without discord, a Home where love knows no fluctuations, where tears will never I flow, where discipline is non-existent (all because it is unnecessary), and a Home where there will be no more parting.

"When the Eastern traveler takes shelter from the scorching heat or halts for the night at some caravansary, which is for the time the house of his pilgrimage, he soothes his rest with a song - a song it may be of war, romance, or love. But the poet of Israel finds his theme in the statutes of the Lord God . . . not songs of old tradition have supported me, but these have been the solace of my weary hours and the comfort of my rest" (Bushnell).

Whatever may have been the variety and severity of this young man's experiences, he makes it clear that through them all he remembered the name of the Lord (Psalms 119:55), and this was his constant consolation in the night - not only the night of physical darkness, but the night of trial as well.

If he were singing to us in this day of our pilgrimage, it most likely would be,

"Take the name of Jesus with you,

Child of sorrow and of woe;

It will joy and comfort give you.

Take it then whene'er you go."

There is both honesty and humility in this whole account. It is personal, of course, but it has great practical value for us. Throughout, he ascribes to the Word of God utility and blessing - a further proof that the Scriptures fully furnish and pleasantly satisfy.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

06.08. The Transforming Vision

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TRANSFORMING VISION CHETH

“Thou art my portion, O LORD:

I have said that I would keep thy words.

I intreated thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me according to thy word.

I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.

I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.

The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law.

At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

The earth, O LORD, is full of thy mercy: teach me thy statutes”

(Psalms 119:57-64).

“Thou art my portion, O Lord” (Psalms 119:57).

THERE IS SOMETHING MORE WONDERFUL than a pot of gold at the end of God’s rainbow of promise. And the one who dares to take Him at His Word will find it. He will possess it. He will enjoy it. It will not be a mere fantasy. Christ died that we might have life. But that is not all. He died that we might have it more abundantly. Faith and obedience are both required to reach into this more abundant realm of spiritual possession and privilege. If our faith were but more simple, we should take Him at His Word.

Is it not time that we got a new vision of God? Someone has said, “The secret of failure is that we see men rather than God. The great awakening sprang into being when Jonathan Edwards saw God. The world became the parish of one man when John Wesley saw God. Multitudes were saved when Whitefield saw God. Thousands of orphans were fed when George Müller saw God.” And God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The psalmist now sees God. The thick, dark clouds of doubt and perplexity are scattered. The light breaks through. The petition for blessing gives way to praise for the Blesser. With Peter, he now launches out into the deep. He gains the proper perspective. The Hand which rescued the sinking apostle laid hold upon him. The One who said to the needy Samaritan, “I that speak unto thee am he,” has now spoken to his longing heart. With the Emmaus sojourners, it was the breaking of bread; with Thomas, it was the wounds in His hands; with the grief-stricken sister of Lazarus, it was one word - “Mary.” And so the Lord reveals Himself.

The psalmist had categorically listed his blessings in the preceding stanza.

Scarcely had the tabulation been completed, if it was completed, when he detected his misplaced emphasis. Was it the blessing, after all, or was it the Blesser that his longing soul primarily desired? For, there on the horizon of his asserting faith is the One who, above all others, is worthy of his deepest devotion and fullest praise. It is a momentous discovery. It is the turning point in his testimony, because it marks the turning point in his experience. His tenseness eases; his frustration disappears; and with beaming eyes turned heavenward, he cries with joyful earnestness: “THOU art all I want, O Lord!”

This is without doubt the grandest moment of his life. The whole situation changes at once. All is bright. His soul is filled with joy. But why had he not discovered earlier this simple but profound fact? Why had it not registered that real victory, wonderful victory, comes only when the Blesser is desired above the blessing, when the Lord becomes all in all to a believing heart?

Here is the pinnacle of the narrative, for now this, individual can say in truth, “I have found Him whom my soul loveth.” And his personal testimony at this point is most helpful. The text, we think, will permit an imaginative interview.

“Tell us, dear fellow,” we ask first of all, “how did you enter into this happy and assuring experience?”

“I thought on my ways” (Psalms 119:59 a), he answers unhesitatingly.

Everyone should ponder the steps of his feet. We must learn that God’s ways are not our ways. Perhaps we do not think carefully, else we would surely make this important discovery. Perhaps we do not think at all in this respect. Victorious living, life on the highest plane, full-surrender, walking with the Lord - all are little more than empty platitudes to the majority of professing Christians.

In this day of magic, mechanical brains and with so many automatic devices, people are thinking less. It is unmistakably evident that people are thinking less about the deeper things of the Spirit.

We should think of what the Lord Jesus has provided for us in His death.

- Of the victory which He makes possible for us through His resurrection.

- Of the purifying force of His promised, glorious return.

- We should think of the irreparable loss we will sustain if we exchange the abundant life for the emptiness of this world.

- We should think of how we do despite unto the Spirit of God by our carelessness and indifference.

- We should think of the glory we rob the Lord by our neglect and willfulness.

- We should think, and that very soberly, of the contribution we are making to possible national catastrophe by playing into the hands of Satan instead of walking in the steps of the Saviour.

For the nation which forgets God goes backward.

“When you thought on your ways,” we continue, “what was the outcome?”

“I turned my feet unto [the Lord’s] testimonies” (Psalms 119:59), is his reply.

What a wide range of practical suggestion may be found in this brief answer. To begin with, his course in life is now definitely changed. The former one is deserted; a new one is begun. Had he continued as he was going, he would have utterly missed this new found joy. Despite his good intentions, his expressed desire, his fervent prayers, his stated conflicts, and his attachment to the Scriptures, his emphasis was wrong.

Now he has a vision of the Lord Himself. This is true realization; this is victory!

“After you perceived the simple secret of this blessed matter,” we add, “how long did it take for you to make up your mind to let go and let God have His way in your life?”

“I made haste, and delayed not” (Psalms 119:60), is his clear and emphatic answer.

Most of us need to take notice of this young man’s resoluteness, of his readiness to act.

Procrastination is not only the thief of time but of eternity as well. Many of us are being robbed daily. We put off until tomorrow what God calls on us to do today. We delay victory, and may miss it entirely. We may live defeated lives now, and then be ashamed at the coming of Christ. We expend our energies ruthlessly, and will find these works at the judgment seat of Christ being burned as wood, hay and stubble. Neglect is costly!

“This sounds like a rather exacting type of life which you have chosen,” we suggest. “Do you not think you will have reason to regret such a decision?”

“At midnight I will rise to give thanks” (Psalms 119:62), he pleasantly assures.

For those who retire at a proper hour, midnight is said to be the most difficult moment to arouse oneself. Thus, by mentioning this particular time, he probably implies that it will not be too difficult now under any circumstance to express gratitude to the Lord for His bountiful mercies and for His loving kindnesses. He is exuberantly grateful. And this is precisely what the Lord desires of us at all times.

“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

It is base ingratitude which keeps the soul lean and the walk wobbly. Gratitude should bring us to our feet, and praise should ever fill our mouths.

“What kind of associations do you expect to have when you isolate yourself in this fashion?” we inquire pointedly.

“I am a companion of all them that fear [the Lord], and of them that keep [His] precepts” (Psalms 119:63), he replies confidently, with no trace of egotism or spiritual pride.

How wonderful indeed to live on a plane with those who continually praise the Lord!

How inspiring to keep company with those who seek always to know and to do the sweet will of God!

How invigorating to the soul to breathe in such an atmosphere!

What encouragement to prevailing prayer, Bible study and daily witnessing!

Is this not something of the abundant life?

“Perhaps you have dwelt upon these matters unduly,” we venture to point out. “Maybe this is purely the product of your imagination. Are you sure there is a fundamental change in your outlook?”

“Whereas once I urged the Lord to deal graciously with me (Psalms 119:17), now I know He has dealt well with me” (Psalms 119:65), he answers calmly. “And whereas I once pleaded with the Lord to incline my heart unto His testimonies (Psalms 119:36), now I have inclined my own heart” (Psalms 119:112).

And it all happened when a young man fixed his eyes of faith on the Lord.

Joshua, the commander-in-chief of the armies of Israel, is mobilizing his forces for a do-or-die thrust against the enemy. Suddenly, he sees the Captain of the Lord’s hosts. He is prostrated with the glimpse. He then rises to conquer.

Job is lauded for his patience. But this is not the salient feature of this righteous servant. What about his vision? His patience was not enough. His patience could not lift him out of his despondency. His patience, like the grinding of un-oiled gears, becomes rather noisy in groanings and complaints. Then, something happens. The tenor of his voice changes. Like a stumbling athlete recovering his balance, he exhibits a new poise:

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5), is the testimony which the sojourner of antiquity poured into the ear of God.

The three disciples reached the top of the mountain. Unexpectedly, voices of the past are heard. There is a bursting brilliance. Their eyes are blinded. They fall to the earth. They hear God speak from the most excellent glory. Then, they rise to “see no man save Jesus only.”

Where is the Lord today? Why do we not see Him? Does He think more of Joshua than of us? Can we blast the walls of Jericho without Him? Will our Ai fall without a vision of Him? Could we with Job lose our goods, our health and our family without seeing Him?

We may climb many mountains in the service of the Lord; we may hear many voices out of the past - the testimonies and experiences of valiant overcomers - but if we go on failing to see “no man save Jesus only,” we will faint in the way.

“Thou art all I want, O Lord!”

How long has God’s ear been waiting for such a word of devotion from you? From me? Three times did Jesus seek to extract a love-note from the heart of Peter. Why can we not let it be a voluntary, heart-motivated expression of sincere love - “Thou art all I want, O Lord”?

In front of United States federal buildings, there have been colorful pictures of Uncle Sam with a pointed index finger. On these lifelike placards is inscribed the statement, “I want you!” Enticing offers of travel and training are held before the eyes of volunteers.

The Lord wants you! He not only wants but deserves all you are and have. He offers the highest type of life conceivable this side of Heaven, then glory beyond proportionate to our choice now, for “there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.”

When He is all you want, He becomes all you need.

“The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy” (Psalms 119:64), the psalmist exults in the fullness of his soul.

We have no more questions to ask. This young man’s expulsive praise and his enlarged appreciation of the Lord’s goodness convince us thoroughly that what he has told us is nothing short of a transforming vision.

But do we have it? Have we any conception of its meaning?

A devout woman prayed recently, “O Lord, all I know about revival is what I have read in books.”

How pitifully small must be the number of those who are willing to draw the abundant flow from the wells of salvation! Of course, there are many kinds of religious antics - sporadic moves, erratic actions, and vain attempts for soul satisfaction. But what we need so sorely is a transforming vision.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

06.09. Advancement Through Adversity

CHAPTER NINE

ADVANCEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

TETH

“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word.

Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.

Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.

The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.

Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver”

(Psalms 119:65-72)

”It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Psalms 119:71). WITH THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE, life has but one pattern. It has but one outlook. It keeps “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” As with the Greeks of old, it is constant in its appeal, “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

To see Jesus is a revolutionary experience. One can never be the same again.

- Stephen sank into martyrdom with the fragrance of forgiveness on his lips when he saw Jesus at the right hand of God.

- Saul of Tarsus unhesitatingly renounced both pedigree and purpose when he saw the Saviour.

- Isaiah burst into violent confessions of uncleanness when he saw the Lord high and lifted up. Then he volunteered his life.

- Ephraim discarded his idols with the declaration, “I have heard him, and observed him.”

- Job emerges from his crucible of trial, triumphant and hopeful, saying, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.”

The psalmist, we notice, has caught a similar vision. We would expect his manner of life to be different henceforth. At the moment, we are impressed with his finer discernment and willing confession. Continuing his inventory of spiritual assets, he can now set down in the credit column things which once he considered liabilities. He now marks off as loss things which once he

counted gain. Here is one of his most revealing entries:

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Psalms 119:71).

But what was the affliction? We do not know. Nor does it matter. Like Paul, he will rather glory in his infirmity. And he gives a concrete reason as to why it was good for him:

“That I might learn thy statutes” (Psalms 119:71), is his forthright explanation.

The loss of a function or a privilege in many a case has proved to be a boon to spiritual development.

With Moses, it was a voluntary choice. He chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”

Admittedly, this is a rare case. Few choose to suffer. Often, however, a trial may prove to be the chastening rod divinely exercised - a blessing in disguise. “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” And note well the explanation which follows at once: “For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it.”

Perhaps this is one reason we are not to “think it strange concerning the fiery trial.” But rather rejoice, knowing that we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings. Oh, for that faith which rests every circumstance and every ordeal with the One who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

Have you ever witnessed mass inoculations among children? Some take it gracefully, like little soldiers. Others raise violent objection. Some sweet little faces remain calm and innocent, others are strained with fright. As the kindly physician explains to the child that the piercing needle will prick but slightly, that it will make him stronger and healthier, even so the Great Physician says, through His servant, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

To applaud the psalmist for turning a handicap into a victory is quite beside the point. We might just as well sing the praises of General Moses for pushing back the water of the Red Sea and leading his armies ingeniously to victory against preponderant odds.

Take a look at his former way of life. Listen to his own honest confession:

“Before I was afflicted, I went astray” (Psalms 119:67).

Should we contradict him? Are we disposed to argue the matter? We cannot gainsay personal testimony.

Suppose the affliction, whatever its character, had not been imposed. Would he have continued in waywardness? Presumably, yes. Then the trial was after all a blessing. It arrested his wandering feet. It spared him more difficulty and loss than can be imagined. The lifeguard is never cruel in smiting the drowning victim whom he is rescuing. Surgery, though painful and inconvenient, is designed to bring health. The psalmist’s affliction was a timely and necessary experience. We have his own word to support this thought.

The reason we hear his praise without complaint and his blessing without bitterness is due definitely to his present yielded spirit. Well does he remember how his troubled heart cried out in

restlessness to God to “deal bountifully” (Psalms 119:17). But now his attitude is different, decidedly different. It is different because he is different. His outlook is different.

“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant” (Psalms 119:65), he now says in an about face.

A line from David’s biography furnishes a parallel example: “For by thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall.”

Running a gauntlet may be most exacting, but not so terrible when the One who is a present help in trouble is running by one’s side. Having done with running the gauntlet of difficulty, David was confronted by a wall. He found himself out of the frying-pan and in the fire. But the One who was with him in the gauntlet is with him at the wall. By divine assistance, he surmounts his towering problem.

On the victory side, he reflects, “As for God, His way is perfect.” And by implication, “I would not now have had it any other way.” If it is God’s way, it must necessarily be the best way. If it is God’s way, it is the only way. True dedication can own no other course.

One of our close friends is a good disciplinarian. She had spanked her little son quite impressively for some disobedience, then moved to another part of the home to resume her household duties.

“Mummy,” she heard a little later in a not-too-normal voice.

“What is it?” she inquired with a degree of firmness.

With a new supply of tears forcing their way to the surface, but with a steadfast gaze toward his mother, the repentant little fellow said with quivering lips, “Mummy, you’re wonderful!”

The psalmist is humble enough to admit that he, too, had been disciplined, for “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” He likewise is standing at the door, a door leading into a new course so full of happy expectation. And what is he saying?

“Thou art good, and doest good” (Psalms 119:68).

Parental discipline is the tempering of childhood and youth to withstand the trials and turmoils of maturity.

The chastening of the Lord is the guardrail of protection against the disastrous chasms into which disobedience would catapult those who swerve from the faith. It is the hand of love which tenderly turns wandering feet back into the course of willing obedience. It is the shepherd’s staff taken in hand for the good of the sheep.

“Teach me good judgment and knowledge” (Psalms 119:66), he asks of the Lord as he remembers how very poor his discernment had been.

Poor judgment can be treacherous in the extreme. But where is it more consequential than in the spiritual realm?

“So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee,” David once confessed.

- This was the result of poor judgment.

- He was unconcerned about the Lord and His love because he chose the way of the foolish.

- He was unenlightened because he closed his eyes to the truth.

- He was ungrateful because he was unaware of the goodness of the Lord.

Better judgment soon remedied this unfavorable condition.

“The proud have forged a lie against me” (Psalms 119:69) is one of the newest discoveries of the psalmist as the enemy strikes at him relentlessly.

What should he do in such a case? Yield to a fitful display of temper? Strike back at once? Threaten the offender vociferously? Or rest the case with a convincing vindictive defense?

Now, we see why he needed good judgment and knowledge. He must know, as well as we, that it really does not matter what others may say or do. We have but One to please. He knows every detail of our lives. He is our Advocate, our Representative. The battle is not ours, but His.

We must observe, in passing, the description which the psalmist gives of those who sought his undoing. They were both proud and prosperous people. Those who are proud know little or nothing of the working of the Holy Spirit, nor can they understand the path of simplicity which the spiritually humble unhesitatingly follow. The proud cannot be content with a plain path. They covet the glittering tinsel of this world’s allurements. They often think it a mark of intellectual inferiority to be humbly and earnestly dedicated to God.

“Their heart is as fat as grease” (Psalms 119:70), he adds.

In this rather uncommon terminology he means to convey, we think, the prosperous estate of his oppressors. They knew no want. Whatever their hearts desired, they had the wherewithal to gratify themselves. They lived in luxury. They went where they pleased. To prove that there is no jealousy or covetousness in his comment, he contentedly testifies, “But I delight in thy law” (Psalms 119:70).

And let no one question such deep-seated satisfaction. The Word of Truth can bring the richest conceivable pleasure into any life. It has the potential to “thoroughly furnish” the believing heart. We have yet to see what a tremendous contribution it can make to the life of this man. It brings to him the greatest amount of enjoyment and blessing.

Instead of being disturbed because of the attempts of the proud and prosperous to dislodge him from his testimony, he turns to Scripture and finds his delight in it.

“The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver” (Psalms 119:72), he assures the Lord.

As one grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, there is proportionately an increase of appreciation. The Word of God takes on a new meaning.

In this narrative, the psalmist becomes increasingly lavish with his descriptive words. They reflect his feeling toward the Book of God.

This Book is priceless!

It is a mine of wealth incomputable, an ocean of wisdom unfathomable, and a sphere of wonder incomparable.

The life it gives, the light it sheds, the love it reveals - all challenge the heart with an overwhelming sense of blessedness.

It is the manna of Heaven; it is the water of life. Only the growing believer enjoys its pervasive refreshment and the practical potency of its living qualities.

Think of it - our friend was going astray until he was afflicted!

Blessed be that storm which turns a drifting bark into such a placid harbor. Affliction is worthwhile, even to be welcomed, if through it one is promoted in spiritual development to the point where the Lord becomes his sole desire, and God’s Word his chief delight.

While affliction, as in this case, has proved to be the means to such a happy estate, it is not the only means. It is better by far to obey His precepts - to walk in the light of His revealed will. If willing submission is hindered by an unwilling heart, then any permitted agent which can curb waywardness and encourage faith is to be considered a favor of God.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

06.10. The Foundation Of Faith

CHAPTER TEN

THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

JOD

“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me:

give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments.

They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word.

I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right,

and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort,

according to thy word unto thy servant.

Let thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live: for thy law is my delight.

Let the proud be ashamed; for they dealt perversely with me without a cause: but I will meditate in thy precepts.

Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.

Let my heart be sound in thy statutes; that I be not ashamed”

(Psalms 119:73-80)

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes” (Psalms 119:80). THE BIBLE HAS MUCH TO SAY about soundness - sound words, sound doctrine, sound minds and sound hearts.

A sound heart is the keystone of spiritual stability.

Unsoundness in any realm is the surest way to failure and regret. By nature, the heart of man is very unsound. Indeed, it is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). God only can change the heart.

“Let my heart be sound in thy statutes” (Psalms 119:80), the young psalmist thoughtfully prays.

He had been very foolish in the past, but now he has burned all his bridges behind him. The future must be brighter. It can only be brighter as the power of divine Truth is allowed to operate in every phase of his being. It must begin in his heart.

If his heart is right concerning the Word of God, it will be right concerning the will of God. There is no question about the soundness of Scripture. If it governs his heart, there will be no question

about the soundness of his heart.

Just how sound his heart is in the statutes of the Almighty is reasonably revealed within the confines of this brief stanza. He begins with an appreciation of the creative power of God. There is no room in his sound thinking for the evolutionary theory with its exposed, exploded and discredited “Piltdown man” fabrication.

“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me” (Psalms 119:73), he declares without mental reservation.

Take a hurried glance at this complex temple of man. Who is the architect and builder if not a wise and wonderful God? Who else could possibly conceive such features and functions? The miles upon miles of the intricate circulatory system is in itself a wonder of wonders. The plasma of life which courses night and day through the massive network of conduits is furnished by a self-contained chemical factory.

The raw material from which it is extracted is delivered by one of the most pleasurable exercises in human experience - eating and drinking. It is pumped at the rate of approximately 2500 gallons daily, purified and pumped repeatedly to every cell in the system by a vital unit which operates miraculously in accomplishing a stupendous job.

The fabulous network which communicates sensitivity and reaction from the farthest part is of Infinite design. The psychic processes which receive; record and retain impressions, and which produce balance, action and co-ordination are of supernatural origin. The twin-lensed photographic equipment with its countless cones and rods has been taking three-dimensional action shots and colored pictures ever since father Adam first blinked an eyelid.

Not only that, the exposure is developed simultaneously and mounted in the gallery of memory.

You are right, absolutely right! God made you and fashioned you. Such a position is not only sound but definitely intelligent to true faith and satisfying to an honest heart. The One whom we love and serve is the great Creator - the Infinite God.

What adoration and devotion He deserves! What thorough obedience He should be accorded! Especially so since the believer is His, both by creation and by salvation.

“They that fear thee will be glad when they see me” (Psalms 119:74), he conjectures with no thought of boastfulness.

Of course they will.

Godly people are greatly pleased always to see others getting on with God. What is more disappointing than to witness professing Christians living as though God does not exist and does not speak. Some:

- Never give a testimony,

- Never seek to win a soul to Christ,

- Never attend a prayer meeting,

- Never lend encouragement to the cause of righteousness.

They classify themselves as Christians, insist that they are going to Heaven, but they never bring spiritual blessing to anyone. This fellow is setting forth a very tender truth in this utterance. He is confident that spiritual people will at once recognize the genuineness of his testimony. And what is more, he is sure they will rejoice and be glad to know where he stands.

Intermittently the tonal quality of his testimony is enriched by an affirmation of the authority and authenticity of the Scriptures. “I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right” (Psalms 119:75) is an illustration in point.

- They are right in all they reveal and in all they require.

- They are right in the history recorded and in the prophecy presented.

- They are right concerning the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God.

- They are right in expressing the condition of the lost and in presenting the salvation of the Lord.

- They are right in condemning uncleanness in the life of a Christian and in calling for complete separation.

- They are right in magnifying the future bliss of the saved and in emphasizing the future doom of the unredeemed.

Each of the last five verses in this stanza begins with the word “let.” “Let thy merciful kindness come . . . let thy tender mercies come . . . let my enemies be discomfited . . . let godly companions come.”

To find an individual who is ready for God’s richest favors is soul-refreshing to say the least. He has advanced to the point now where he can say in truth with David, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

Notice how thoroughly the psalmist exercises his God-given privileges in prayer. James tells us that “we have not because we ask not.” With this young man, there is frequency of petition and perpetual confidence in prayer. He honored God in humble dependence as well as in firm expectancy.

“Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort” (Psalms 119:78), he quietly petitions.

Since there is a steady trustfulness about his attitude, he will learn that the kindness of the Lord is not only merciful but marvelous, excellent and everlasting.

However the greatest exhibition of God’s kindness is yet to take place. The Church should lift their eyes and long for that hour. Here is the record: “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

In that hour, all the creatures of glory will stand agog! Then the Heaven of heavens will resound with exceeding joy, long anticipated, as the children of God are presented to the Father. In the meanwhile, the kindness of the Lord is for our comfort and encouragement.

“Let thy tender mercies come unto me” (Psalms 119:77), he continues.

This is not so much a prayer as it is the reaching out of a longing heart. It is not a repetition of the former request; it is an extension. Just as a reclining person extends the arms to bring a loved one within reach for a kiss or an embrace, just so intimately and so realistically, the psalmist is communing with God. He is saying, “Come nearer.” And the added words in this request, “that I may live,” make the meaning both tender and impressive. To a thoroughly dedicated person, life is meaningless unless he is conscious of the nearness of the Lord.

The nearness of the Lord to one in this life is dependent upon the nearness of one’s life to the Lord and this the main challenge of victorious living.

When Jacob awoke out of his sleep, he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.” When we are awakened out of our sleep of indifference, we too will find that God is near. God is always near. “He be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move and have our being;” but, like Jacob we may be in such a condition as to know it not.

Some of us should tremble at the thought of what we must be missing in the way of hallowed wholesome, spiritual blessing. We seem to think that it is all reserved for Heaven. When we hear of those godly folk who have lived under the sensitive touch of the Spirit and have made such a mighty impact with their testimony, we are as those that dream. It seems too wonderful to be true.

“The proud . . . have dealt perversely with me without a cause” (Psalms 119:78), he complains ere he concludes his prayer.

It is never pleasant to be unfairly treated. It always rubs the fur the wrong way. We all wish that we could avoid such experiences, but come they will. We sob our lament into the ear of our loving Father, but He permits many things to try our faith and to test our patience.

He has asked that we “count it not strange” when fiery trials come upon us. Oppressors will oppress, faultfinders will find fault; and critics will cut us with their comments. We must keep on going on. We dare not be deterred. However rough the road, it will end some day; and at its end all will be well. Perverse dealers will deal with us then no more, forever.

You will notice that the maltreatment accorded the psalmist was entirely without provocation.

Satan instigates such matters, and he has no regard for fair play. However, afflictions and persecutions could be the tempering heat to give the ring of genuineness to one’s testimony. But a trial, no matter its character, can never furnish an excuse for failure in the spiritual life. The prominent point which the psalmist is emphasizing, of course, is that he had been suffering innocently.

Is this not bearing a likeness to our blessed Lord? Jesus did not occasion the indignities which were heaped upon Him.

The New Testament throws some interesting light on a matter such as this. It says, “For this is grace, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.”

Next comes a very logical request in the psalmist's prayer. "Let those that fear thee turn unto me" (Psalms 119:79), he appeals.

Here he is asking the Lord to furnish him godly companions.

This is not only a logical request, but a reasonable one, a proper one. The Lord is both able and willing to do this. When He supplies the companions, they are the right type.

- They will not lead us astray.

- They will not dull the luster of our witness for Christ.

- They will love the things we love.

- They will exalt the Lord we adore.

It is good to let the Lord lead us into such contacts, for companionship tells on character. Sooner or later we become like those with whom we associate.

"Let my heart be sound in thy statutes," he pleads.

He wants to be a man of spiritual wisdom and stability. He means to build his devotion, his knowledge and his love on a firm foundation of heart soundness.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

06.11. Snares Discovered

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SNARES DISCOVERED

CAPH

“My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word.

Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?

For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.

How many are the days of thy servant?

when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?

The proud have digged pits for me, which are not after thy law.

All thy commandments are faithful: they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me.

They had almost consumed me upon earth; but I forsook not thy precepts.

Quicken me after thy lovingkindness; so shall I keep the testimony of thy mouth”

(Psalms 119:81-88) “The proud have digged pits for me” (Psalms 119:85). THE PSALMIST IS IN DIFFICULTY. The enemy is striking hard! It is a renewed attack. Job was right. “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.”

These are ideal moments for the tormentor of souls to ironically ask, “Where is thy God?” Where is He? Why He is near - “a present help in trouble.” God can brighten the darkest horizon with the light of His comfort. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,” He assures. “And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned.”

Waters! Fires! These are more than mere figures of speech when translated into experience. They are real waters. They are swirling, dashing, turbulent waves - an actual tempest, threatening to inundate plans, to uproot happiness, to submerge hope, to destroy faith. And the fires? They too are real. The flames often are hot.

“My soul fainteth for thy salvation [deliverance]” (Psalms 119:81), he confesses rather wearily.

But fatigue is not failure. It is not unusual for strength to wane. Those who wait on the Lord will have their strength replenished. This is what the psalmist is determined to do, for in the same breath, he adds, “But I hope in thy word.”

Herein is the secret of steadfastness. Herein is the anchor for the fainting heart. Therefore, let the tentacles of your faith become entwined about the indestructible Word of God. Then you will build

on the Rock foundation against which all the fierce waves and giant billows of Satanic power will dash in vain.

One who has had a transforming vision of the Lord will not be jarred loose from his mooring. He has the persuasion that what he has committed unto the Lord will ever be safely guarded. He had already trusted everything he is, and has, to an able Deliverer. He does not share with David such Wishful thinking as “Oh, that I had wings like a dove. Then would I fly away and be at rest.”

There is a repose of confidence concerning the ultimate outcome when one allows God to make the way of escape.

Most of us must be reminded frequently that triumph in Christ does not guarantee freedom from trial, but that it does assure favor when trial comes. “God hath not promised skies ever blue, flower-strewn pathways always for you.”

What military general would promise his soldiers freedom from wounds in combat? What athletic director would assure his players escape from injury in a contest? If such promises could be made, valor would be non-existent; bravery would never merit a citation. But, does the soldier refuse to do battle? Does the athlete fear his contest? No! Neither should the follower of Christ hesitate one moment to suffer reproach with his Lord!

But we must not be unsympathetic in our attitude toward this young man. We know he is in a trying situation when he prays, “My eyes fail for thy word” (Psalms 119:82).

There was a long and eager waiting. But what was blurring his vision? Tears, simply tears, the kind which you and I have shed at some turn in the road of life. Tears stain the faces of folk in every clime, in every age. They are not necessarily an indication of weakness.

Visualize, if you will, the iron Napoleon as he witnessed his seemingly interminable troops marching into the Prussian campaign. Tears became noticeably evident on his cheeks. Many a valiant soldier has been acclaimed a hero in battle, and given appropriate decorations in honor thereof, who had left the induction station with moistened eyes when torn from the arms of his mother or sweetheart.

“When wilt thou comfort me?” (Psalms 119:82), the psalmist asks rather impulsively.

An improper question to put to the Lord? Not exactly.

At least it is a very natural one. A troubled heart again and again will raise the inquiry: “When will the waters subside? When will the fires be quenched?” But did you notice? In the very language of his prayer he betrays a firm confidence that God will comfort him - sometime.

The conflict, of course, has made him a little restless, or if you insist, a bit impatient. This is further reflected in Psalms 119:84, where he asks, “How many are the days of thy servant?” How wonderfully patient is our blessed Lord with all His followers! He knows each aching heart; He sees each falling tear; He never forsakes us in our times of desperation, for it is written, “I will never under any circumstance leave you in the lurch.”

We listen now as the psalmist gives a personal description of his case. “I am become like a bottle in the smoke” (Psalms 119:83), he laments.

It was common in Asia, we are told, for leathern vessels known as “wineskins” to become darkened and to shrivel and crack when hanging close to the fire. This, he seems to feel, is an apt characterization of depressing influence of grief which is infiltrating his troubled breast.

The Great High Priest who listens to these multiplied heart cries from day to day has felt both the smoke and fire of trial and is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. It is not that He does not care when our hearts are pained too deeply for mirth and song. The gold is only pure and shiny and valuable when the dross is purged away. The crucible of suffering is often the gateway to richer blessing and to sweeter fellowship with the Lord.

“The proud have digged pits for me” (Psalms 119:85), he maintains.

But this is not unusual. What should we expect when we face a cruel enemy? In the recent Korean war, captured soldiers were treated in an imponderably brutal manner. Weakened through brainwashing, they were ruthlessly prodded along death-dealing marches, then in some revealed instances pushed heartlessly over cliffs. Godless enemies are capable of blood-curdling inhumanities. Spiritual foes are not one whit more considerate of the welfare of those whom they attack. But it is much to the advantage of the psalmist to have discovered these subtle snares. The enemy cannot be engaged until he is located.

Satan is a treacherous trickster. He will block the course that leads to the sinner’s salvation and blast his hopes for eternity. He seeks also to blind the eyes of the saint, to baffle his mind and to blight his testimony. His deceptive and destructive ability is being woefully minimized, if not willingly ignored. His appearance is as an angel of light. His appeal is multiform and his field of strategy exceedingly extensive.

Man’s weakness is his main avenue of approach, and he will dog the believer’s path while his emissaries dig the pitfalls. But the enemy in this case is detected.

The psalmist’s method of dealing with the foe is the wisest and the best - indeed the only successful means of counterattack.

Hear his outpoured declaration:

“I hope in thy word . . . I do not forget thy statutes . . . I forsook not thy precepts.”

Somehow he has learned as we all must learn that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”

Perhaps our curiosity is aroused. We would like to know of what the “digged pits” consist.

In other words, what kind of temptations did people have in those long ago days? But would we be wiser if we knew? Any more able to resist the Devil? The figure which the psalmist employs when he speaks of success is taken from the practice of hunters. They lay traps for their game. The type of snare used depends upon the kind of animal sought. We are forced to believe that Satan is quite up-to-date in his use of snares. Anything to trip a believer is readily adopted. Jesus said that the adversary has been both a murderer and a liar from the beginning.

A Christian philosopher some years ago allegorically described a convention in Hell.

The Devil was presiding. Addressing the chair, an impish demon spoke.

“Your Majesty, we could produce more godlessness on the earth if we concentrated our attack against the Church.”

Another, with the same respectful salute, disagreed.

“We can make greater progress, your Honor, by striking at the unity and affection of the home.”

The discussion was prolonged.

Finally, one proposed with a demoniacal grin what he termed a “masterstroke.” All paid rapt attention.

“Most Worshipful Master,” he began with a pretentious bow, “Let us destroy the chastity of womanhood. Then the home will crumble and the Church will collapse. We could begin with a cigarette, and later slip in a reefer. We could begin with a cocktail, move to champagne, then glamorize the thrill of heroin. We could begin with some simple jokes and stories slightly tainted, and proceed to the hilarious, spicy, suggestive kind to perforate moral restraint -”

Riotous applause of wicked glee brought an interruption and the deafening demand for adoption.

Yes, the Devil is still digging pits. We must be aware of his snares. Better still, we must ever and always submit to the control and leadership of the Holy Spirit who will guard us from pitfalls and lead us in a way that is pleasing to God.

You will recall in the earlier part of the narrative that this young aspirant to holiness expressed his desire to live for the Lord.

We observed his former testimonies and promises. We witnessed him as he gained a clear vision of the Holy One; and yet he now must confess, as the fierceness of his struggle against temptation subsides, “They had almost consumed me” (Psalms 119:87).

Is not our need for the Advocate great? Jesus looked upon Peter with a solicitous tenderness, and said, “I have prayed . . . that thy faith fail not.”

How unable we are to cope with the enemy. How often we too are almost consumed.

The psalmist needs the quiet place, the throne room. He needs to wait upon God. “Quicken me after thy lovingkindness” (Psalms 119:88), he fervently prays.

Before he may be called upon to go through another such ordeal, he needs to be built up on that most holy faith.

“Quicken me!” he pleads.

Having been almost overcome by the tempter, he recognizes that his spiritual resources are sadly depleted. The appeal is for replenishment, and this is the most striking proof of a genuine desire to grow in the things of the Lord.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.”

~ end of chapter 11 ~

06.12. Assurance At Its Best

CHAPTER TWELVE

ASSURANCE AT ITS BEST

LAMED

“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.

Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.

They continue this day according to thine ordinances: for all are thy servants.

Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.

I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me.

I am thine, save me; for I have sought thy precepts.

The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.

I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad”

(Psalms 119:89-96)

“I am thine” (Psalms 119:94). A NIGHT OF DARK TRIAL has passed. It is a new morning now. Weariness of soul, heaviness of heart and tiredness of mind have given way to renewed strength. The sun has risen on a more placid scene. Holy quietness reigns. The psalmist finds no necessity this morning to say, “Be still, my soul.” There is a hallowed calmness and a sense of the Divine presence. In quietness and confidence, he possesses his soul. There is an inward surge of affection, a welling-up of humble devotion as he whispers, “I am thine.”

Here is attachment of the first order. Here is relationship supreme. It is a soothing consciousness of a definite oneness with the Almighty. It is an assurance which bulwarks and blesses as nothing else. He may fail utterly in his well-meaning attempt to explain to others the blessedness of this joyful fact, for it requires the keenest spiritual perception to properly appraise an inward work of the Spirit. It also necessitates the most careful employment of terminology to rightly express that appraisal. To him, however, it is no longer a matter of theory; it is experience. His statement is beautiful in its simplicity - “I am thine.”

“Save me,” he adds in the same fervency of spirit and earnestness of devotion.

But, you ask, why should he make an appeal to be saved? He has already indicated his devoted attachment to the Lord. Not only that, it has just been suggested that the scene is now so tranquil. Ah! but here is not the thought of deliverance. It is, rather, that of preservation. There is a very tender connotation surrounding the word “saved.” To be saved is to be drawn from the pursuer to the protector. Here the emphasis is not on “from” but rather on “to.”

I am thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice, And it told Thy love for me;

But I long to rise in the arms of faith, And be closer drawn to Thee. When Moses had no companion but immature Joshua, he sought earnestly for a closer fellowship with God. He requested a revelation of grace and a glimpse of glory. The answer from Heaven was immediate and gratifying: “And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me . . . come up in the morning.” This was in effect a manifestation of parental affection in response to a desiring child.

The late Dr. B. H. Shadduck, a recognized Christian apologist, quoted the inimitable words of the Lord Jesus, “How oft would I have gathered you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.”

In commenting, he stated that the simplest and most expressive interpretation conveyed the thought of cuddling. At this juncture in his address, the electric power failed, plunging the auditorium into dense darkness. Taking advantage of the situation, he continued, “How passingly wonderful, whether in the darkness of disappointment, sorrow or death, to be cuddled to the bosom of the Almighty.”

“For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalms 119:89). Here is the voice of devotion once again.

These deep confessions and striking testimonies simply do not issue from an empty heart.

Sounding brass and thinking symbols never beam sweet melody heavenward. They must come out of holy engagements with the Book. Surely such praise for the Scriptures had never escaped his lips before. Never had he gone so deep with God.

Now he reaps the blessed untold benefits of yielding spirit, soul and body, of believing and trusting the Scriptures, of giving the Word of Truth a reasonable opportunity to operate in his life. He now strikes gold that glitters, and his vision brightens. He now sounds depths which stagger his soul. He now envisions glory which makes his heart to pound with wonder. Try to convince him that it is but a dream, and he will regard your comment as totally unworthy of notice. You simply cannot discount reality.

“Thy faithfulness is unto all generations” (Psalms 119:90), is but another transmission of deep-down confidence. And what if it were not so! Then, how could we trust God in this day? In any day? We would with no compunction whatsoever, and with the companionship of the overwhelming majority, exchange our souls for a beggarly “mess of pottage” which this dying world is offering to depraved souls.

- We would with little restraint of scruples, eat, drink and be merry.

- We would see no value at all in spending time in prayer with the humble few who believe that God is still in the business of hearing and answering.

- We would find little hesitation in going wherever we are invited or wherever our hearts dictate if, within the limits of our own moral code, we may find a passing thrill or a moment of pleasure.

- We would make every attempt to keep preoccupied so as to entertain as little thought as possible of death and what might conceivably be beyond.

But if God is just as real in our generation as He was in the generations of the noble, triumphant stalwarts whose never-fading records stand as monumental exhibitions of divine love and grace, then we too should want to acclaim His faithfulness.

- We should want to live in the power and reality of that faithfulness.

- We should want every wayward tendency to be restrained.

- We should want to act in the dark as we would behave in the light.

- We should want to be as true to God when we are among strangers or in foreign places as we attempt to be among friends and in familiar spheres.

In other words, as love begets love, even so faithfulness on His part should elicit faithfulness on ours. Surely, we must find it in our hearts to agree with this man's testimony: "God is ever faithful."

"Thou hast established the earth," the psalmist affirms. Then with marked emphasis, he assures, "And it standeth" (Psalms 119:90).

It still stands. The axis has never been replaced by a more up-to-date invention. This globe has never required any added supports to sustain it in its orb. It has ever afforded man the most intriguing challenges. He has prospected and experimented laboriously. Still it relinquishes its abounding treasures of diamonds and precious metals, of ores, oils, gases and nuclear material.

Job, by superhuman revelation, spoke of how God made the earth from nothing and hanged it on nothing. Then, before a finger could be snapped, he added, "These are but the outskirts of His wonders."

You see how this dedicated man bolsters his faith. He takes a look at the multiplied wonders of creation, and says, "They continue this day according to thine ordinances" (Psalms 119:91).

The inference? Simply this, if God can maintain the vast and intricate realms of His physical creation, He can sustain us on a higher plane. Do you not agree?

I should have not the least hesitation in committing my life to such an all-wise, all-wonderful, all-powerful Creator.

Day by day the psalmist is growing in wisdom and understanding. His deep insight into the power and authority of the Word and his increasing appreciation of the sovereignty of God are pleasingly manifested.

As the moon and sun and stars are ordained of the Lord, even so the earth and everything pertaining to it must conform to His ordinances. These created bodies, he observes, are "all thy servants" (Psalms 119:91). He likewise is a servant of the Most High God. He must respond to and fully obey His laws.

There is something of an analogy in Psalm 19. In it we gain the impression that the writer is first sweeping the heavens, then searching the heart.

First, it is the work of the Lord; then it is His Word.

It develops two considerations - the sun out of its position would wreck the universe; the servant out of his position will ruin the unity of the testimony. We need to learn the seriousness and the untold consequences of disobeying the commandments of the Lord.

The window of memory is flung open. There, inscribed delicately on the screen of the psalmist's mind, is the nightmare of affliction through which he had gone. "Unless thy law had been my delights," he honestly confesses, "I should then have perished in mine affliction" (Psalms 119:92).

It is not affliction itself which causes a demolition of testimony. He almost perished in, not because of, his affliction. We can never blame circumstances.

- What held him firm in the face of bitter attacks? "The law of the Lord."

- What bulwarked him against vicious thrusts? "The law of the Lord."

- What furnished him light in those dark hours? "The law of the Lord."

And it is just the same today.

"I will never forget thy precepts" (Psalms 119:93) we hear him promising enthusiastically.

The supporting value of the Scriptures in trial can never be assayed.

- Every hospital patient needs a Bible.

- Every counselor needs the Sacred Volume.

- Every sojourner needs the Book.

Here is a person who has put it to work. He has felt its benefit. He has proved its miraculous power.

Of course he would never forget it! The sheer joy of such revealing experiences puts new vigor into his dedicated life and new forcefulness into his testimony. There are amazing possibilities in the application of the divine commands for all of us, even unforgettable experiences, to say nothing of the promised eternal reward.

The psalmist becomes specific. He cites a definite example. "The wicked have waited for me to destroy me" (Psalms 119:95), he states.

The enemy's purpose, you see, was clearly known. He sought the psalmist's undoing. It is not a figment of his imagination. Nor is it an exaggeration. To blast a testimony like this would most naturally be a chief target for Satan. But how did he conduct himself during such attacks? He occupied himself with the Word of God. When he took refuge in the Word, the Lord took care of the enemy.

A missionary couple in South America recently had a similar experience and a like result. A marauding throng of Gospel-haters had gathered outside their small upstairs apartment. There was a wild demonstration with vicious threats and a concerted demand for the lives of the missionaries. Police protection was unobtainable. Friends were far away. No human help was available.

The two young witnesses went to their knees and claimed repeatedly the promises of God. How long they had taken refuge in the faithfulness of God and His Word they did not know; but when they returned to the window, the mob had dispersed. How graciously is divine care draped about the shoulders of the needy who trust in Him!

When one is gaining altitude in his spiritual growth, the panorama of divine wonders becomes richer, wider and more entrancing. And this is precisely what the psalmist joyfully discovers. Now he may sing with truthfulness, “I’m pressing on the upward way;

New heights I’m gaining every day.”

Like the first man in a mountain-climbing team, having established himself firmly on a higher ledge, he, by his challenging testimony, extends an assisting hand to those who also would reach the loftier heights.

Hear his loud exclamation from the mountain peak, “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad” (Psalms 119:96).

If we may interpret the thought of his heart as herein expressed, it is this:

“There may be a limit to the work of creation,

But there is no boundary to the Word of Revelation.”

What a mighty tribute this is!

In emphasizing some amazing aspects of astronomy, this most accurate of all sciences, David said, “The law of the Lord is perfect.” That is, the Scriptures are most dependable.

- There may be eruptions in the sun, but “the Scriptures cannot be broken.”

- Meteors may be hurled from planets, but “one jot or one tittle (the dotting of an “i” or the crossing of a “t”) shall in no wise pass from the law.”

Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”

There is no limit to the confidence which may be reposed in the Word of God. However fierce may prove the storms of life, however much our little crafts may be tossed about by the winds and waves of adversity, each believer may rest assured that the Bible can be trusted in every detail always.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

06.13. Love's Enduring Object

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LOVE’S ENDURING OBJECT

MEM

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.

I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.

I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me.

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way”

(Psalms 119:97-104)

“O how love I thy law!” (Psalms 119:97)

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET of untold trials, plagued by many a tempter, conspired against by the proud, almost consumed in the crucible of suffering, yet the psalmist stands as a permanent exhibit of the protecting grace of God. He attributes his every deliverance to the Word of Truth. That he should so love the Book of God and so declare that love for the encouragement of all succeeding generations is the salient feature of the Psalm.

As he grows with the Bible, the Bible grows with him. It grows into his life, into his attitudes, and into his actions. It grows into his heart, into his love, and into his praise. When he speaks, the Scriptures are invariably involved in his statements.

- He speaks as though it were a vital something and it is!

- He relies upon it as though it were indispensable, and it is!

- He refers to it as though it were final in its pronouncements, and it is!

If you require documentary evidence for an affirmation, if you desire logical reasons for an assertion, here is one who is ready to oblige you copiously. His is not a hit-and-run kind of testimony. He stands by with convincing, substantiating facts. When he makes a claim, he seems eager for the opportunity of explaining why he makes it. When he delivers a statement, he wants

to be reasonably sure it has registered.

The one who has the answers is always a person of poise, conviction and confidence. Personal testimony is difficult to refute. If a sane and honest individual declares he was at a given place, surely a past master in the field of polemics could not convince him that he was elsewhere. But why does the psalmist display such affection for the Bible?

“Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies” (Psalms 119:98) is but one explanation from his own lips.

He did not seek to match wits with his persecutors. He did not attempt to pit his strength against his oppressors. He had learned through the Scriptures the folly of such procedure.

When the enemy opened fire, he did not return a blow for a blow, a shell for a shell, or a bomb for a bomb. That is not tactically correct in spiritual warfare. “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh. even his enemies to be at peace with him,” and this veteran of many a battle is now content to let God deal with his enemies while he himself delves into the revelation of Truth, to test his ways. When enemy fire ceases, he knows he is back in line with the pleasure of God.

There is a sense, of course, in which an offensive must be waged. We are specifically commanded to “resist the Devil.” But we should be wise enough to know that our weapon is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of Truth. It works! It will ever work! When the Saviour was in the arena of satanic attack - in the garden of temptation - it is beautiful to observe how effectively he wielded the weapon of Scripture. Each time the enemy made his thrust, Jesus countered, “It is written.” There was never any question as to which way the battle would go. There should be no question today.

This man was wiser than his enemies. He knew the way of life. The Apostle Paul assured Timothy that the Scriptures are able to make one wise unto salvation, and if one ever gets wise to the glorious fact, it must be through the Scriptures.

In another important sense he was wiser than his oppressors. Through Bible meditation, he had gained an unshatterable confidence in the promises of God. Even as Paul shouted to the terror-stricken sailors in the Mediterranean tempest, “It shall be even as it was told me!” so also this young servant of God believes every promise from Heaven will be minutely fulfilled. Whether a sinner needing salvation, a saint needing counsel and comfort, a servant needing guidance and strength, the Lord has promised full satisfaction.

One who is inspired with such sustaining faith is wiser than an unbeliever.

Having now affirmed the blessing of wisdom derived from revealed truth, he moves on to declare, “I have more understanding than all my teachers” (Psalms 119:99).

Egotism? No! Boastfulness? No! Simply a suggestion that since he has appropriated the testimonies of the Lord, he has a type of knowledge and wisdom that his human teachers had not acquired. He is not comparing ability; he is contrasting authority and value. In this sense, an unschooled Mountaineer may conceivably be wiser than an Einstein. Some of us have had schoolmasters who, though resourceful in the wisdom of the world, were destitute of the wisdom of God.

The story of a bugle boy in Civil War days comes to mind. A distinguished military leader, critically ill, knew that this was his last battle, and that it was with grim, despicable death. He knew he was losing the battle. He expressed his desire for a chaplain, but none was available. Reference was made to the unusual faith of the bugle boy. The general requested him. They by-passed all the trained staff members in order to reach this lone lad who was wise in the knowledge of the message of life. Blessed indeed is that individual who invests time and study and prayer in procuring this superior, supernatural wisdom.

That was not all. The psalmist's understanding of the Scriptures not only exceeded that of some of his former schoolmasters, but he added, "I understand more than the ancients" (Psalms 119:100).

By "ancients" we believe he is referring to the aged who should be wise by long experience, but have, not become acquainted with God. The thought is sad, but true in numerous cases.

Everywhere, you may find people who are growing old without acquiring a workable, beneficial grasp of the Bible. To our young readers, in particular, we must put this question: Do you intend to advance, in years without growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord?

In an interview with the beloved Dr. Peter W. Philpott, who was at the time eighty-six years of age, he reflected, "I have never found it a hardship to grow old with God."

Years cannot be retarded. They must come and go, and with their passing we are being carried irresistibly to maturity, to middle age, to the sunset of life, to the end of the journey. In the meanwhile, we must become wise in heavenly matters. Nothing now can begin to approximate its importance. We must cherish the opportunity and make full use of the privilege. We must encourage our hearts "to know Him and the power of His resurrection."

"I have refrained my feet from every evil way" (Psalms 119:101), the psalmist's testimony continues.

How? Simply by adhering to the law of the Lord.

It can be applied to every phase of one's life. It commands us:

- To bridle our tongues,

- To set a seal on our lips,

- To restrain our feet,

- To lift up our eyes,

- To wash our hearts,

- To cleanse our hands.

Like an antiseptic it goes to work to destroy the bacteria of evil thoughts and ungodly desires.

Like a magnet, it draws our affections to Him who is altogether lovely.

No one with any perceptible appreciation of the divine Record could very comfortably step into an evil way or engage in a wicked enterprise with his Bible in his hand. If the printed Volume openly

displayed can prove a deterrent from evil actions, how much more will the engrafted Truth curb the evil emotions which give rise to the unbecoming moves.

Nothing is impossible with God, and since God is in His Book, the Scriptures have a power to accomplish wonders in the life of a human being. It begins with the new birth, leads in the new way, and brings us to a new house eternal in the heavens. Give it a chance; let it prove its victory power; then give God the praise.

Why don't we allow God to use His great power in our lives? Why aren't we eager to see our great God doing great things? How can we be content to say that the God of Elijah still lives when the axe doesn't swim and the sun doesn't stand still? That is to say, how can we get any honest satisfaction out of stating that God is powerful - omnipotent - and yet never witnessing His great power in our daily lives?

We believe He can restrain wayward feet, else we would long since have perished from the realm of testimony, but we are all plagued with the fearful lack of evidence in our lives that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly."

"I have not departed from thy judgments" (Psalms 119:102) is the wholesome confession which follows these notable statements.

None but the most foolish individual would make such a departure.

Who, for one moment, would entertain the least thought of forsaking that which has been the source and the channel of such indescribable blessings? Where would one turn? "To whom shall we go?" asked Peter. "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Those who would forsake the law of the Lord are those who have never penetrated very far into the treasure house where may be found things both old and new.

- Are we going to allow ourselves to be duped into the acceptance of worthless substitutes in this godless age?

- Are we going to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage?

- Are we going to let our feet lead into some evil way?

Never forget it, we all have a proneness to do so. Our hearts are more deceitful than we believe.

"I hate every false way" (Psalms 119:104), the psalmist vowed with emphasis. Do you?

An illiterate mother in the mountains of the eastern part of our country had an incorrigible son. One day, this recalcitrant told his mother that he would like to trade a brand new crisp dollar bill for a worn, soiled bill which he had seen in her possession. She was ignorant of the fact that she was exchanging a worn "five" for a crisp "one." Beware of the crisp or shiny outer appearance. You may barter away a good testimony or a soulwinner's crown for some deceptive counterfeit.

It is no wonder that the psalmist abhorred everything of a false, deceptive character.

The stanza before us opens with a positive declaration of affection for, and an attachment to, the Word of God. As the same stanza comes to a close, there is a magnificent characterization of the

Scriptures and a beautifully stated delight in them.

“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Psalms 119:103).

This expression is in every sense a heart appreciation. He had tasted the Truth. It was sweet to his taste. It satisfied his appetite. Isaiah spoke of the cleansing blood of the Lamb washing whiter than the snow. The psalmist states that the Word of the Lord is sweeter than honey. There is always want of a satisfactory comparative when divine matters are being evaluated.

Surely our hearts should be allured into a deeper hunger and a stronger thirst for the Word which is ever the enduring object of a believer’s true love.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

06.14. The Floodlighted Pathway

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE FLOODLIGHTED PATHWAY

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalms 119:105). THE INTERESTING INDIVIDUAL of Psalm 119 gave the most extensive, the most coordinated, and the most sustained testimony regarding the authority, value and permanence of the Scriptures to be found in the whole of the Bible. And no single utterance which fell from his lips contains more beauty and meaning than this: “Thy testimonies are wonderful . . . the entrance of thy words giveth light” (Psalms 119:129-130).

Since our Lord is wonderful, His Word must be wonderful, for it issues from Him. If it gains entrance, it will give light. This is its inherent character. The Word delighted this young man’s soul and dissipated his doubts. But while one may assent to its glorious properties in theory, one will never rejoice over its wonders until its power is proved in practice.

It was by no means a meticulous, methodical, chess-like consideration on his part which maneuvered the psalmist’s feet around the snares and over the rough places, and brought him so luminously into the pages of God’s Who’s Who. Decidedly not! At every turn, in every victory, he gladly attributes the praise entirely to the sustaining and guiding power of the Scriptures. How very important it is that each of us should find the blueprint for his life in the unerring revelation of God, then to build accordingly by the grace which it superabundantly makes available.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet” (Psalms 119:105), he joyfully points out.

He has discovered the practical value of this wonderful Volume which many of us esteem so lightly. And this is no mean discovery. It is a must in the advancement of devotion. The psalmist required illumination, and here it is. Surely the man of God is fully furnished. Nothing he needs is overlooked.

There are perils in the darkness. Any unlighted path presents the sandaled Easterner with many difficulties if he attempts to pick his way along the uneven terrain. He is fortunate indeed who has a lamp at his feet when necessity forces a night journey.

Each succeeding step can be taken with certainty. The analogy is clear.

What serious perils there are for those who walk in spiritual darkness! This is the reason for the sad stumbling on the part of the multitudes. This is the cause for so many precipitous plunges into moral debacles. This is the unquestionable answer to most of life’s sorrows. Jesus said, “Men love darkness because their deeds are evil.”

The psalmist looked upon the Scriptures, not only as a lamp unto his feet, but as a light unto his path. In other words, the Bible not only assists one in making one’s daily decisions, but it illumines the whole course. It not only shows one where to step, but to where those steps will lead. This is

the thought expressed by Solomon when he said, “The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Jeremiah recognized the need for the guiding potential of the Word of God when he said, “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” He also concurred with the psalmist regarding the sweetness of the divine testimonies; “Thy words were found, and I did eat them,” he reveals, “and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”

German youth found the words of Mein Kampf and began eating them. In due course, the false philosophy which incited their minds with such unprecedented fanaticism draped sorrow around the shoulders of this sick old world and plunged their Fatherland into bondage and ruin.

The people of Russia found the words of the protocols and the Marxian precepts and ate them. Today, the whole of the human race stands in jeopardy because this godless plague has been foisted upon more than half of the earth’s population. History will never record that the testimonies of Marx, Lenin and Hitler were wonderful, or that they brought light. Nor will their words ever become sweet to the taste. Multitudes who have imbibed this diabolical curse are already crying in blighted lands, and all other infected peoples are destined to cry with the prophet of old, “There is death in the pot!”

When the psalmist declared, “The entrance of thy words giveth light,” he was not expressing an opinion. He was stating a fact. He was proving it in his own experience.

But in our day, people go to great pains to shut out that light. They all but ignore the exhortation to study the Scriptures. They abstain from church attendance with little or no compunction. An athletic contest attracts people more readily than a Bible conference. Many who have religious inclinations are described as people who spurn wholesome instruction and heap unto themselves teachers to merely tickle their ears.

“Order my steps in thy word” (Psalms 119:133), the psalmist requests resolutely, like a soldier seeking assignment.

Here is one who is not concerned about having his ears tickled. He wants his heart blessed. He wants the Lord to tell him which way he should take.

Paul’s attitude was of like nature. “What wilt thou have me to do?” he asked of his newfound Lord. How important it is to keep in touch with headquarters, and to get directions from above! God wants to order the steps of His people - to lead them in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

“I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments” (Psalms 119:131), this soul-searching individual reminds the Lord.

What kind of gasping is this? What kind of intensive longing? The mouth is open, but inarticulate. Whether figurative or actual, what does it symbolize?

As the Word of Truth was esteemed more highly than his necessary food by Job of old, even so here the same heavenly Revelation is regarded more essential than the air the psalmist breathes. This is spiritual devotion in a dramatic display. His heart is panting after God.

Such soul desire is almost foreign to the knowledge and experience of our generation. In a flight of the imagination, step into Robert Murray McCheyne's study on a Saturday night as he is preparing his heart for the Lord's Day worship. Christ is his breath, his life, his all! He is engaged in self-condemnation. His outbursts of confession, his display of contrition, expressed partly in Latin and partly in English, prove conclusively his hatred of sin and his passionate desire to honor and to glorify his Lord.

"Unreasonable!" one cries. "Too emotional!" another maintains. "Fanatical!" others charge. But this dear servant of Christ, "being dead, yet speaketh." It is now two hundred years since his voice was heard, but his printed words are pregnant with power; his testimony is still charged with challenge, and his diary of dealings with God can send any conscientious Christian to his knees.

McCheyne would not have castigated Patrick Henry for giving vent to his patriotic emotions in crying, "Give me liberty or give me death!" He would not have chided Abraham Lincoln regarding his passionate plea for emancipation. Neither would he have criticized enthusiastic college cheerleaders for their antics, acrobatics and hilarity at a football game. He who espouses a cause should put himself into it heart and soul. By the same token, Robert Murray McCheyne deemed the cause of Christ worthy of his all. The psalmist is a person of like mind in his pursuit of life on a higher plane.

If we do not mean to find God in our spiritual experiences, what then is our aim? Our plan is purposeless; our efforts are vain; our profession is mockery. We play at something which is holy, depreciate eternal values, and hold Truth in unrighteousness.

God's wrath is said to be revealed from Heaven against such violations of His most holy designs. We need to be made over. With Paul, we need to know Christ and the power of His resurrection. Then life will become an adventure of praise and gratitude. God will be real, and our hearts will know the blessedness of tracing the movements of the Holy Spirit upon our souls. We will be doing business with Him and for Him - daily. There will be fruitfulness, joyfulness and victory.

Any attempt to convince the psalmist that his day lacked many of the factors which now militate against a strong, consistent Christian testimony would meet with immediate failure. It would not be agreeable to him or helpful to us. God is superior to any age or period. As the need abounds, His grace superabounds, and this is what makes people godly. "I am what I am by the grace of God," was Paul's ever humble explanation.

This young man can tabulate an impressive list of trying situations. He only alludes to them in terse comments here and there, and they are mostly contained in his fervent prayers. He does not have to explain to One who is omniscient. The Lord knows the details. Doubtless the pits which were digged and the snares which were set involved immorality of some types and worldliness of many kinds.

"Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me" (Psalms 119:143), he frankly states.

Yes, he had his problems, but he cleaves to the Scriptures relentlessly. One never can sink with a lifesaver such as this.

And so, with the Book in heart and hand, the psalmist moves onward.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

06.15. The Zenith Of Security

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE ZENITH OF SECURITY

“Thou art my hiding place and my shield” (Psalms 119:114) THE PSALMIST IS MAKING a persistent ascent, albeit painfully arduous at times. He is now at the summit. Before him lies a sweeping vision into three states:

- The state of Biblical magnificence,

- The state of human destitution, and

- The state of personal development.

There are the towering peaks of Holy Oracles emblazoned on the horizon of his sanctified vision; there are the weary windings of a flowing stream of humanity, ebbing out to the sea of disillusionment and doom; there is the favorable promise of fruitful areas in the newly fertilized soil of his soul.

He has reached the mount of understanding, the highest peak in the range of practical godliness. Here the pattern for his life is fixedly final - God preeminently first, others prominently second, self purposely last. He is overwhelmed with wonder, love and praise. Like an explorer raising a flag to mark the point of discovery, he turns his eyes heavenward and presents a pledge of allegiance:

“I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right . . . I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever . . . every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever . . . my heart standeth in awe of thy word” (Psalms 119:128, Psalms 119:152, Psalms 119:160-161).

The psalmist is no longer a novice in spiritual enterprise. There is a tone of certainty in his voice as these sound, meaningful, and well-measured statements issue from his lips. While he, with all of us, must look constantly to the Lord for daily strength, and while there are intermittent petitions for special help, no longer are there cries of perplexity, uncertainty and desperation such as those which were heard earlier in his life. Here is the reason.

“Great peace have they which love thy law” (Psalms 119:165).

This peace is not what the world speaks about, fights and dies for - an uncertain, unstable, unsatisfying something to grasp at but never to be sure the grip is firm and lasting. No, it is something real, something restful, something refreshing! It is the ultimate in confidence, the fountain of joy, and the foundation of fellowship. It is a priceless possession.

This restless, writhing, shiftless age in which we shuffle along, grabbing, grasping, gaining what we may, needs as nothing else this message of possessing “great peace.” But suppose we were to schedule an appearance of this young psalmist in our most prominent city auditorium. How

much fanfare and “best” talent would be required to procure a hearing with the soul-hungry masses?

Suppose he were to relate for us today with careful and prayerful detail how he caught a vision of God and of the richest, deepest joy imaginable; how he once was not too serious about Bible claims; how he learned about those who knew God in a real way; how the matter became a pressing issue with him to the point of his surrendering wholly to the Lord; how it had all proved to be glorious, real, unspeakably wonderful. Would he make a “hit”? Would he receive a return engagement? Would he not at once be branded as “too serious,” “fanatical,” “unrealistic,” “bigoted”?

“Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psalms 119:117), he prays.

Here is an index into the walk of faith. He does not fear consequences. He does not expect all to understand what God has done in his life. He simply desires the consciousness that “underneath are the everlasting arms.” He wants no other support. This is protection enough. Verbal attacks and satanic snares will constitute no alarm whatsoever. The tempter may wax convincing, but with the Lord holding him up there is no fear of evil thrusting him down. This is safety! This is security!

“Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (Psalms 119:111), he confides with noticeable pleasure.

What other heritage lasts so long? What other means so much? What other is so available? And note the naturalness of his comment. The testimonies of the Lord were provided for him. He is simply reporting to the Lord that he has taken them, even as a child would say to his father upon his return from work in the evening: “Daddy, I got the candy you left for me this morning.”

Thus, in similar fashion, the psalmist is taking what God has left for his use and enjoyment. This is the simplicity of faith.

We hear occasionally of hermit souls who live and die in the severest of poverty, but with thousands of dollars tucked away in an old tin box. This is a very strange thing to fathom. But stranger far is the fact that millions are living and dying in absolute spiritual destitution when the wealth of all Heaven is available in the gold mine of the Bible.

It is your heritage, young people. It is your heritage, adults. Take it! Let is be the joy and rejoicing of your hearts here and now, and the promise of your eternal reward later in the land that is fairer than day.

“Thou art my hiding place and my shield” (Psalms 119:114), he assures the Lord, after viewing the coldness, crookedness and cruelty everywhere about him.

- What a shelter in the midst of a desert storm would mean to a worried sojourner, the Lord is to one in the storms of life.

- What a covert would mean to a wanderer as a protection from the blowing sands of an arid waste, the Lord is to a believing heart when the blasts of adversity strike with crushing velocity.

- What rivers of water would mean to the thirsty traveler over the dusty plains, the Lord means to the thirsty soul.

- What a shade tree would mean to the sun-fatigued plodder, the Lord is to the trusting one in the heat of life's exacting trials.

How good to be able to say with Solomon, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight."

During World War II, there was an acute shortage of electricity in the Niagara area of Canada, with legally enforced dim-outs and the use of certain appliances rigidly restricted. There was, of course, measureless power pouring over Niagara Falls continually-infinitely more than the need, but it was not being appropriated. Instead, it rushed into the rapids of non-use and reached the whirlpool of lost energy. How true is this of unavailed, superabundant grace! How true is it of the lavish love and protecting care of our wonderful Lord!

The account of the psalmist gives us a very graphic illustration of the ups and downs one may experience who presses for the deeper, richer things of God. But it also gives to us just as vividly how victory may become the order of the day. Herein is the great practical value of Psalm 119.

The constant trust which this young man reposes in the Scriptures is a most magnificent tribute to the availability and the profitableness of the Word of God in the daily life. It is also a challenging exhibition concerning the possibility of a human heart, of either young or old, finding full satisfaction and sweet contentment in the things of the Lord.

We know this to be the promise of Truth, but the precept must have its example. Most of us are dull of hearing and slow of heart to understand when it comes to matters of spiritual import. Thus, the Holy Spirit attracted the attention of the psalmist to the victory life by presenting a display of people who had enjoyed and were enjoying this type of blessed experience.

There is great comfort in spiritual development. There is true satisfaction in it.

"Thou art my hiding place and my shield," is the testimony of all who take refuge in the Rock of Ages. This is the Gibraltar of unassailable protection, of impregnable safety. And Satan is aware of this fact. This is his reason for strenuously barricading the way which leads to victory, and to such unshatterable assurance.

In his failure to dislodge righteous Job, Satan accused the Lord of "hedging" him in. It is a true accusation. For "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people."

The psalmist is in the secret place. We tread softly as we come upon him. He is engaged in prayer. He seems unconscious of the external influences for the moment. He is closed in with God.

"Thou art near, O Lord" (Psalms 119:151), he whispers in a sacred and solemn manner.

This is victory! This is life on the highest plane! This is what his heart had longed for all the time. He had forced upon himself substitutes of many kinds, as multitudes so foolishly do, but there was no settled peace in his soul. There was no joy. Solomon, too, tried strenuously to find soul satisfaction short of the Lord's way. He gave himself to industry, to philosophy, to pleasure. Futility stared him squarely in the face.

“It is all vanity;” the wise man concluded, “It is the whole duty of man to fear God, and to keep His commandments.”

“Thou are near, O Lord,” the psalmist’s praying heart maintains.

Now his desire is fulfilled. Now it matters not what others say or do. Now the wonderful words of life are sweeter than honey. Now his pathway is bright with hallowed illumination - all because he had inclined his heart to perform the statutes of the Lord (Psalms 119:112).

~ end of book ~

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