

WRITINGS OF WILLIAM MACDONALD - VOLUME 1

by William Macdonald

*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by William Macdonald (Volume 1),
compiled for study and devotional reading.*

99 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 00.00. MacDonald, William - Library
2. 01.01. Christ Loved The Church
3. 01.03. The Church Which is His Body
4. 01.04. Great Truths About the Church
5. 01.05. The Local Church Defined
6. 01.06. The Headship of Christ
7. 01.07. The Holy Spirit in the Church
8. 01.08. Discipline in the Church
9. 01.09. Expansion of the Church
10. 01.10. Ordained of God
11. 01.11. Coming to God
12. 01.12. The Bishops
13. 01.13. Those Who Serve
14. 01.14. Taking Our Place - The Ministry of Women
15. 02.01. Final Destiny
16. 02.02. What is your authority?
17. 02.03. What does the Bible say about our destiny?
18. 02.04. There's hope for the hopeless
19. 02.05. Only one true way to heaven
20. 02.06. Why some people don't trust Christ
21. 02.07. The moment to decide
22. 02.08. How can I know?
23. 02.09. What's next?
24. 02.10. A final word
25. 03.01. Leadership Kit
26. 03.02. Table of Contents
27. 03.03. Assembly Planting
28. 03.04. Qualifications of Elders
29. 03.05. Duties of an Elder
30. 03.06. Recognition of Elders
31. 03.07. Church Growth
32. 03.08. One-on-One Discipleship
33. 03.09. Leadership Training
34. 03.10. Church Growth through Hospitality
35. 03.11. Fundamentals and Secondary Issues
36. 03.12. Sample Statement of Doctrine
37. 03.13. A Sample Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage
38. 03.14. Women's Role In the Church
39. 03.15. Meetings of the Assembly

40. 03.16. Women's Silence
41. 03.17. Ministries for Women
42. 03.18. Summary
43. 03.19. The Prayer Meeting
44. 03.20. Privileges of Fellowship
45. 03.21. Responsibilities of Fellowship
46. 03.22. Decently and in Order
47. 03.23. Parachurch Organizations
48. 04.01. Lord, Break Me!
49. 04.02. Foreword
50. 04.03. God Values Broken Things
51. 04.04. Conversion A Form Of Brokenness
52. 04.05. Elements Of Brokenness
53. 04.06. What Brokenness Does Not Mean
54. 04.07. The Generation Gap
55. 04.08. The Marital Gap
56. 04.09. God Wants Us All To Be Broken
57. 04.10. Think Of The Results
58. 04.11. Lord, Break Me
59. 05.001. Old Testament Digest
60. 05.002. Table of Contents
61. 05.003. Introduction
62. 05.004. Genesis
63. 05.005. Outline Of Genesis
64. 05.006. Chapter 1
65. 05.007. Chapter 2
66. 05.008. Chapter 3
67. 05.009. Chapter 4
68. 05.010. Chapter 5
69. 05.011. Chapter 6
70. 05.012. Chapter 7
71. 05.013. Chapter 8
72. 05.014. Chapter 9
73. 05.015. Chapter 10
74. 05.016. Chapter 11
75. 05.017. Chapter 12
76. 05.018. Chapter 13
77. 05.019. Chapter 14
78. 05.020. Chapter 15
79. 05.021. Chapter 16
80. 05.022. Chapter 17
81. 05.023. Chapter 18

- 82.** 05.024. Chapter 19
- 83.** 05.025. Chapter 20
- 84.** 05.026. Chapter 21
- 85.** 05.027. Chapter 22
- 86.** 05.028. Chapter 23
- 87.** 05.029. Chapter 24
- 88.** 05.030. Chapter 25
- 89.** 05.031. Chapter 26
- 90.** 05.032. Chapter 27
- 91.** 05.033. Chapter 28
- 92.** 05.034. Chapter 29
- 93.** 05.035. Chapter 30
- 94.** 05.036. Chapter 31
- 95.** 05.037. Chapter 32
- 96.** 05.038. Chapter 33
- 97.** 05.039. Chapter 34
- 98.** 05.040. Chapter 35
- 99.** 05.041. Chapter 36

00.00. MacDonald, William - Library

MacDonald, William - Library MacDonald, William - Christ Loved The Church MacDonald, William - Final Destiny MacDonald, William - Leadership Kit MacDonald, William - Lord Break Me MacDonald, William - Old Testament Digest MacDonald, William - That's a Good Question MacDonald, William - To What Should We Be Loyal MacDonald, William - True Discipleship MacDonald, William - Where is Your Treasure S. A Mess of Pottage S. A New Year's Prayer S. An Overview of Ecclesiastes S. At Such a Cost Thy Bride S. Balanced Conversation S. Being a Spiritual Example S. Bringing Forth Fruit S. CHRIST THE HEAD S. Cold Formalism or Unconventional Ways

S. Complaining S. Contemporary Lies of the Devil S. De Profundis - Out of the Depths S. Developing the Graces of a Christ-Filled Life

S. Discipleship S. Divorce and Remarriage S. Doctrinal Fads And Fancies S. Drugs, Demons, And Destruction S. Elders and the Retirement Trap S. Evangelism and Social Involvement S. Evangelistic Malpractice S. Expansion of the Church S. God Pays For What He Orders S. Graveside Prayer - Dave Johnson S. He Careth For You S. High-Sounding Nonsense S. I Like The Assemblies S. If This Life Were All S. It's Time We Faced the Facts - Why is the Church Powerless?

S. Judicial and Parental Forgiveness - What's the Difference?

S. Learning in the Darkness S. LET US GO FORTH UNTO HIM!

S. Let's Hear It for the Assemblies S. Liar Deceiver Destroyer S. Love Not the World S. Mourning Over The Past S. Obedience and Sacrifice S. Should We Hire a Pastor?

S. Speaking Unadvisedly S. Taking Our Place - The Ministry of Women S. Tell Him His Fault S. That Unpopular Word—Discipline

S. The Bishops S. The Christian in Service S. The Church Which is His Body S. The Desire For Riches S. THE LOCAL CHURCH DEFINED S. The Natural Man and the Things of God S. The Perfect Judge S. The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ S. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man S. Thoughts on Prayer S. True Scholarship

S. True Worship S. What Kind of Unity?

S. What's In a Name?

S. When Tolerance is Sin S. Which is Greater S. Who Can Be Trusted S. William Barclay S. World's Wisdom vs. God's Wisdom S. Worship Then and Now

01.01. Christ Loved The Church

Christ Loved The Church by William MacDonald

01.03. The Church Which is His Body

The Church Which is His Body DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH In the New Testament, the word church is a translation of the Greek word *eklesia*, which means “a called-out company,” “a gathering” or an “assembly.” Stephen used the word to describe Israel as “the church (assembly) in the wilderness’, (Acts 7:38). It is also used in the book of Acts to describe a heathen mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:32; Acts 19:39; Acts 19:41). But the most common use of the word in the New Testament is to describe a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus Paul speaks of “the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). In his first letter to the Corinthian Christians, the great apostle divides the whole world into Jews, Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). Again, he identifies the church of God as including the group of Christian believers whom he persecuted before his conversion (1 Corinthians 15:9).

It has often been said that the Church is not an organization but an organism. By this is meant that it is not a lifeless institution but a living unit. It is a fellowship of all those who share the life of Christ and who are linked together in living union by the Holy Spirit. It has been well called “a pure communion of persons without institutional character.” Many descriptive titles are given to the Church in the New Testament, and one of the best ways of arriving at an understanding of the church is to consider the significance of each title. The following are the prominent descriptions of the church:

1. A flock (John 10:16, R.V.). The Jewish nation was a fold. The Church is a flock. In John 10:16 the Lord Jesus said, ‘Other sheep I have which are not of this fold (Israel): them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock (R.V.) and one Shepherd.’ The idea of a flock brings before our minds a group of Christians living together under the loving, tender care of the Good Shepherd hearing His voice and following Him.
2. God’s husbandry (1 Corinthians 3:9) The Church is God’s garden plot in which He purposes to raise fruit for His glory. The thought of fruit-bearing is thus brought before us here.
3. God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:9) This expression pictures God as carrying on a building program. He is adding living stones to the Church. How important it is that our lives should be devoted to the construction project in which He is so vitally interested!
4. The temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16) The word ‘temple’ immediately brings before us the thought of worship, and reminds us that the only true worship God gets on earth today is from those who are members of the Church. Worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Such worship can only come from redeemed hearts.
5. The body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23) The body is the vehicle by which a person expresses himself. Thus the body of Christ is the unit through which the Lord chooses to express Himself to the world today. Once this great truth is grasped, a believer will never again think of the Church as of minor importance, but will devote himself unreservedly to the best interests of the body of Christ.

6. A new man (Ephesians 2:15)

Here the idea of a new creation is prominent. The greatest of all differences among men—that of Jew and Gentile—has been abolished in the Church, and God makes of these two peoples one new man.

7. An habitation of God (Ephesians 2:22) This expression conveys the truth that God now dwells in the Church, rather than in a material tabernacle or temple, as in the Old Testament.

8. The bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Corinthians 11:2) This view of the Church gives prominence to the idea of affection. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.” If Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, then obviously the Church should be filled with bridal affection for Him.

9. The house of God (1 Timothy 3:15) A house (or household) speaks to us of order and discipline. The thought of order is suggested in 1 Timothy 3:15 : “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God.” Discipline is suggested in 1 Peter 4:17 : “Judgment must begin at the house of God.”

10. The pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15) In addition to being a support for a building, a pillar was often used in early days for posting public notices. It was a means of proclamation. The word “ground” means a bulwark or a support. Thus the Church of God is the unit which He has ordained for proclaiming, supporting, and defending His truth. We may safely say, therefore, that if Christians are to be in the current of God’s will and purposes, they should devote their finest efforts to the expansion and spiritual welfare of the Church. **THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

Many boast today that their mission is to preach the gospel, and they take a detached view of anything to do with the church. They should notice that the Apostle Paul’s ministry was twofold: (1) “To preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,” and also (2) “To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery,” that is, to ground them in the great truths of the Church (Ephesians 3:8-9).

ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Great and godly men have differed widely as to the time of the beginning of the Church. Many believe that the Church is a continuation of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. Others maintain stoutly that the Church did not exist in the Old Testament, but that it began in the new dispensation. In favor of the latter viewpoint are three considerations. In Ephesians 3:4-5, Paul speaks of the Church as a “mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” Again, in verse 9 he states that the Church is a ‘mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.’ (See also Colossians 1:26; Romans 16:25-26.) Thus the Church was a secret, kept by God throughout the Old Testament times, and never revealed until the New Testament apostles and prophets appeared. In Matthew 16:18, the Lord Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my Church.” In other words, the Church was still future at the time He spoke. Again, in Ephesians 4:8-10, Paul emphasizes that it was the risen, ascended Christ who gave gifts to the Church. This argues

strongly that if the Church existed before His ascension, it must have lacked gifts for its edification.

We believe it is not only possible to show that the Church began in the new dispensation, but, more specifically, that it was brought into being on the day of Pentecost. The body of Christ is said to have been formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Can we determine then when the baptism with the Holy Spirit took place? In Acts 1:5, immediately prior to the Lord's ascension, He promised the apostles, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." On the day of Pentecost, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4; Acts 11:15-16). By the time we reach Acts 5:11, the Church has definitely come into being, because we read that "great fear came upon all the Church..." This certainly seems to pin-point the birthday of the Church as occurring at Pentecost.

01.04. Great Truths About the Church

Great Truths About the Church THERE IS ONE BODY

According to Ephesians 4:4 there is only one Church. In spite of all the circumstances that seem to deny it, the fact remains that as far as God is concerned, there is only one body of believers on the earth today. Although this Church is never visible to man in its entirety, yet it is formed into a common body by the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY By using the analogy of the human body (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18), Paul teaches us that Christ as Head in heaven controls His body on earth. The head speaks of authority, leadership, and the seat of the intellect. The head and the body share the same life, interests and prospects. As the head is not complete without the body, so, in a sense, Christ is not “complete” without His Church. Thus we read in Ephesians 1:23 that the Church, as His body, “is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” This is cause for deepest awe and worship in the believer.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE MEMBERS OF THE BODY The moment a person is saved, he is added to the Church as a member of the body (Acts 2:47). This membership transcends the bounds of race, color, nationality, temperament, culture, social caste, language and denomination. In his classic passage on the members of Christ’s body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26), Paul reminds us that there are many members in the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). Every member has a function to perform (1 Corinthians 12:15-17). However, not all members have the same function (1 Corinthians 12:19). The welfare of the body depends on all the members working together (1 Corinthians 12:21-23). Because all the members of the body need each other, there is no cause for envy or discontent, on the one hand (1 Corinthians 12:15-17); or for pride and independence on the other (1 Corinthians 12:21). Because all are members of the one body, there should be mutual care, sympathy, and joy (1 Corinthians 12:23-26). **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH**

After He ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be His Representative on the earth (John 14:16; John 14:26). The Spirit’s activities in the Church may be seen in part from the fact that He leads Christians in their worship (Ephesians 2:18); He inspires their prayers (Romans 8:26-27); He empowers their preaching (1 Thessalonians 1:5); He guides them in their activities, both positively (Acts 13:2), and negatively (Acts 16:6-7); He raises up overseers for the church (Acts 20:28); He bestows gifts for its growth and effectiveness (Ephesians 4:11) and He guides believers into all truth (John 16:13). **THE CHURCH OF GOD IS HOLY**

God is calling out of the nations a people for His name. He sets them apart to Himself from the sinful world and calls upon them to respond with lives of practical holiness (1 Corinthians 3:17). Only in this way can the Church faithfully represent a holy God in this corrupt scene.

GIFTS ARE GIVEN FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH

It is the Lord's will that the Church should grow both spiritually and numerically. To that end the risen Christ gives gifts to the Church (Ephesians 4:11). These gifts are men who are given special ability to build up the Church. As listed in Ephesians 4:11, the gifts are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. (see note 1).

We believe that the apostles and prophets were concerned primarily with the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). The need for these apostles and New Testament prophets passed when the foundation was laid, and we no longer have them, in the primary sense of the terms.(see note 2)

However, we still do have evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The evangelists go out to the world with the Gospel, bring sinners to Christ, and then lead them into the fellowship of the local church. Pastors take a shepherd-care of the flock, nourishing the sheep, encouraging them, and guarding them from evil. The teachers unfold the Word of God in an understandable way, and present the doctrines of the Scriptures in a well-balanced manner. However, the probability is that the "pastor-teacher" gift is one gift as the care of the flock would include teaching the Word of God. As these gifts minister, the Church grows and the saints are built up in their most holy faith. Gifts are God's provision for the expansion of the Church.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE PRIESTS OF GOD A final truth which we will mention in connection with the Church is the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9). In the old Testament, only a certain group of men were eligible for the priesthood– the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron (Exodus 28:1). Today there is no special caste of priests, separate from their fellows, with distinctive garb and peculiar privileges. All children of God are priests of God with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with such a name. THE COMPLETION AND DESTINY OF THE CHURCH As has already been noted, the Church is now in the process of construction. Every time a soul is saved, a living stone is added to the building. The edifice is rising silently without sound of hammer. The Holy Spirit adds daily to the Church such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

One day soon, the work will be finished. The last stone will be added, and the Lord Jesus will descend into the air. As if drawn by a divine magnet, the Church will rise to meet the Savior, and together they both will return to the many mansions of the Father's house. And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

It will be the Church's blessed portion not only to be with Christ forever, but also to share the glories which He won during His earthly career (John 17:22).

Throughout eternity the Church is destined to be an eternal witness to the glory of God. "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). In the meantime, the Church is God's masterpiece on the earth – an object lesson to principalities and powers in heavenly places of the manifold wisdom of God. Every believer should therefore be vitally interested in the Church, and his Christian service should have the expansion and edification of the Church as one of its primary aims.

NOTES (1) In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, another list of spiritual gifts is given: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues. There is no necessary contradiction between the two lists. In Ephesians 4:1-32, the gifts are persons whose whole career, apparently,

is given over to evangelism, teaching, or pastoral work, In 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, the gifts are endowments or abilities which are not necessarily limited to certain individuals but which the Holy Spirit may give to any member of the Body of Christ at any time He chooses. For instance, any Christian man may be Spirit-led to give a “word of wisdom” or a “word of knowledge” and yet not be exactly a teacher. Another may be able to point a soul to Christ and yet not be an evangelist.

Again in 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul speaks of apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues. The question inevitably arises here as to whether we still have gifts of a miraculous nature today. In Hebrews 2:4, it is stated that God used signs and wonders to authenticate the early preaching of the Gospel. This was in days before the complete Word of God was available in written form. Many believe that with the coming of the complete Bible, the need for these miracles ceased. The Bible does not settle the matter decisively. While we believe that these miracle gifts are not with us today, generally speaking, yet we cannot say that the sovereign Spirit is not at liberty to use them still, especially on those mission fields where the Scriptures are not extensively available. In any event, those who do profess to have these miraculous gifts must be careful to use them in accordance with the instructions of the Word (for example, the use of tongues is regulated in 1 Corinthians 14:1-40).

NOTES (2) In a secondary sense, we doubtless still have apostles, if we simply mean men sent forth by the Lord, In this lesser sense, we still have prophets also, that is, men who cry out for God against sin and abuse But we utterly reject the idea that there are men today who have the same authority as was committed to the original apostles or who can speak by the same direct and inspired revelation as the New Testament prophets.

01.05. The Local Church Defined

The Local Church Defined THE LOCAL CHURCH DEFINED

Down through the years, there has been considerable disagreement as to what constitutes a New Testament church. The usual approach is to list a certain number of requirements or marks; if a group of Christians answers to these qualifications, then it is considered to be a true local church.

Henry Barrow has given what might be considered a rather typical definition of a church. He defined it as follows: "A true-planted and rightly-established church of Christ is a company of faithful people, separated from unbelievers, gathered in the Name of Christ, whom they truly worship and readily obey. They are a brotherhood, a communion of saints, each one of them standing in and for their Christian liberty to practice whatsoever God ha commanded and revealed unto them in His Holy Word."

1 Corinthians 1:2 gives a simple, yet accurate description of a local church. "To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

Other definitions have been far more restricted with the result that only the churches of a certain denomination or group actually qualify. THE NEW TESTAMENT APPROACH This raises a very real question. Does the New Testament list a certain number of requisites or essentials of a local church? Are the marks of an assembly stated so clearly that any believer could separate the fellowships in any area into those which ate true New Testament churches and those which are not?

We would suggest that this is not the case. If becoming a true church were merely a matter of conforming to a certain pattern or going through a specified routine of meetings, then this could be done quite mechanically without spiritual exercise. Lethargy and complacency would result. Though the position of a church might be ever so correct, yet the condition of the believers might be far otherwise.

Instead of that, we believe that the New Testament approach is this. All believers are instructed that, by the grace of God, they are members of the Church. They are exhorted to gather together in such a way as to give expression to the great truths of the Church. Some assemblies of Christians give a very poor representation of the body of Christ. Other groups present a more faithful likeness. None does so perfectly.

Thus, instead of following the legalistic method which says, 'If you meet certain requirements, you will become a church,' the language of Scripture is the language of grace; namely, "You as believers are the Church; now meet in such a manner as to give an accurate expression of this fact to the world." The motive power under grace is love for the Savior, and this love should make us want to present a faithful image of the body of Christ to those around us. A BRIEF SUMMARY - THE LOCAL CHURCH To summarize then, the local church should be a miniature of the Church

universal. It should be nothing and do nothing that would contradict the great truths of the Church which is the body of Christ. As Ridout has said: "Its nature and unity must be manifested. It must be seen that it is the body of Christ, formed by and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that all believers are members of it, united to Christ glorified and to one another; that the Lord's coming is the hope before it; and that the Name of Christ is the only one by which it is called. Furthermore, it must exhibit the unity of the body of Christ."

If then, the local church must be a replica of the complete Church, what are the great truths of the body of Christ to which it must provide a living testimony? We have already referred to seven of these fundamental truths; namely:

- A. There is one body.
- B. Christ is Head of the body.
- C. All believers are members of the body.
- D. The Holy Spirit is the representative of Christ in the Church.
- E. The Church of God is holy.
- E. Gifts are given for the edification of the Church.

G. All believers are priests of God. Our present objective, therefore, is to take these truths one by one, and seek to determine how the local church can portray them to the world. THE TRUTH OF THE ONE BODY The first truth to which the local church is responsible to witness is that there is one body. How can believers testify to this fact today?

1. WHAT NAME SHOULD BE TAKEN

Perhaps the most obvious way is by adopting no names that would separate them from other Christians. In the church of Corinth, some were saying, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Christ." Paul indignantly condemns such a spirit by asking, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

Today Christians divide themselves into denominations named after countries, religious leaders, ordinances, or forms of church government. All such are a practical denial of the unity of the body of Christ.

Clearly, the scriptural approach is for God's children to be known only by such names as are given in the Bible— names such as "believers" (Acts 5:14); "disciples" (Acts 9:1); "Christians" (Acts 11:26); "saints" (Ephesians 1:1); and "brethren," (James 2:1). It is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks in the Christian life to carry no name but that of a simple believer. The vast majority today feels that one must belong to some organized church and carry some other name than those given in the Word. Anyone who refuses to be known as anything but a child of God will suffer reproach at the hands even of other Christians and will always be a conundrum in the community. Yet how can believers consistently do otherwise? But obviously it is not enough just to have a scripturally accurate name. It is all too possible to adhere strictly to the language of the Bible and yet be extremely sectarian in spirit. Some in Corinth were saying, "I am of Christ," for instance. Perhaps they prided themselves on the correctness of their name, but they actually meant that they were of

Christ to the exclusion of other true believers. Paul found fault with them equally as much as with those who claimed loyalty to himself or Apollos.

2. WHAT ABOUT THE DENOMINATIONS? When any doubt is voiced as to the scripturalness of denominations, the objection is commonly raised that the Lord has richly blessed in some of the great divisions and sects of the Church. Granting that this is true, we should still remember that the blessing of the Lord does not indicate divine approval in every detail. He honors His own Word though often its delivery is accompanied by much failure and imperfection. If God blessed only where there was perfection, there would be no blessing. Therefore the fact that any group has seen His hand does not mean that He approves of all that the group does. The message is always greater than the messenger. The Lord's attitude toward divisions in the Church is clearly shown in 1 Corinthians 3:4 : 'For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?'

Divisions in the Church bring great evils. They create artificial barriers to fellowship. They limit the movement of gifted men of God whose ministry should be available to all the Church. They confuse the world, causing men to ask, "Which church is right?" In his renowned work, *The Lord's Prayer for Believers*, Marcus Rainsford wrote: "For my own part, I believe sects and denominations to be the result of the devil's attempt to mar and hinder as far as possible the visible union of the Church of God; and that they all have their root in our spiritual pride and selfishness, our self-sufficiency and our sin.'

"May God forgive us for, and correct our divisions! Nothing gives greater occasion to the outside world, than the differences between professing Christians. The bickerings and contentions between men and women of different sects and denominations of the visible Church of God has always been one of the world's greatest hindrances. Instead of looking on, and being constrained to confess, 'See how these Christians love one another,' the world has too often reason to say, 'See how they carp at one another, see how they judge one another, see how they malign one another.'

Sadly, this deplorable state exists all too often within some local churches and dishonor is thereby brought upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. TRUE UNITY

Believers who determine to witness to the unity of the body of Christ will find it a great difficulty to separate themselves from all divisions in the Church, and at the same time maintain a loving spirit toward all the people of God.

C. H. Mackintosh, beloved author of the *Notes on the Pentateuch*, wrote: "The grand difficulty is to combine a spirit of intense separation with a spirit of grace, gentleness and forbearance; or, as another has said, 'to maintain a narrow circle with a wide heart.' This is really a difficulty. As the strict and uncompromising maintenance of truth tends to narrow the circle around us, we all shall need the expansive power of grace to keep the heart wide and the affections warm. If we contend for truth otherwise than in grace, we shall only yield a one-sided and most unattractive testimony. And on the other hand, if we try to exhibit grace at the expense of truth, it will prove, in the end, to be only the manifestation of a popular liberty at God's expenses most worthless thing."

W. H. Griffith Thomas expressed the same thought in his book, *Ministerial Life and Work*: “Let the principles be firmly fixed on the unmistakable rock of Divine truth, but let the sympathies go out as widely as possible to all who are endeavoring to live and labor for Christ. Never shall I forget the words of the saintly and noble Bishop Whipple of Minnesota, the Apostle of the Indians, as I heard them in London on a memorable occasion: ‘For thirty years I have tried to see the face of Christ in those who have differed from me.’ The visible display of the unity of the body of Christ is not to be brought about by the various ecumenical movements about which so much is heard today. Such unions, councils or federations succeed only by compromising the great truths of the Scripture. Christian congregations deny their Lord when they join with those who repudiate the virgin birth of Christ, His sinless humanity, His substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension and exaltation, and His coming again. The true basis of Christian unity is a common devotion to Christ and His Word. When His glory is the great desire of our hearts, then we will be drawn together, and then His prayer will be answered: “That they may be one, even as we are one,” (John 17:22). As Griffith Thomas has said, “It has often been pointed out that when the tide is out, there are little pools of water here and there on the shore, separated from each other by vast stretches of sand, and it is only when the great tide rolls in and submerges them all in its vast embrace that they become one and are united. So must it be, so will it be with our severances of heart, ‘our unhappy divisions’; the great tide of God’s love will flow deeper and fuller into each and all of our lives, and in the ocean of that love we realize the Divine ideal of love, joy, peace for evermore.” In the meantime the responsibility of local churches is to seek to maintain a testimony to the unity of the body of Christ in a day when most of Christendom serves only to deny the fact. They can do this by acknowledging in spirit, principle and practice all their fellow-believers.

01.06. The Headship of Christ

The Headship of Christ

CHRIST THE HEAD A second truth to which the local church should be a witness is that Christ is the Head of the body. How can believers testify to this fact today? Obviously they must accept no human leader as head of the Church. The most glaring violation of this is the head of a large religious system who claims to be the temporal head of the body of Christ. Most Christians today have seen the folly of such a pretension, yet in somewhat subtler forms the evil has infiltrated into almost all segments of Christendom. The Headship of Christ is truly acknowledged when He is allowed to control the church's activities, to make its decisions, to superintend in every department. To many this will sound vague and impractical. How can the Lord in heaven guide a local church on earth? The answer is that He will never fail to make His will known to those who patiently wait on Him for it. True, this requires a great deal of spiritual exercise on the part of the believers. It would be much easier to take matters in their own hands, and make their own plans. But it should be remembered that New Testament principles can only be carried out with New Testament power, and those who are unwilling to tread the path of dependence, prayer, and patient waiting will never have the privilege of seeing the Great Head of the Church guiding the local church or assembly here on earth. At this point it might be appropriate to emphasize that it is one thing to give lip-service to the Headship of Christ and quite another thing to acknowledge it practically. There are some who apparently would shed their blood for the truth of the Headship of Christ, and yet who deny it practically by being virtual dictators in the assembly. A man or a group of men may not have any official title or designation in a church and yet rule it ruthlessly. Diotrophes was such a man (3 John 1:9-10). He loved to have the preeminence; he spoke against godly men like John with malicious words; he would not receive such men, and forbade those who would, casting them out of the church. This was a positive denial of Christ as Head.

Perhaps a word should be added concerning the headquarters of the church. The word headquarters speaks of the center of operations and of authority. The headquarters of the church are where the Head is; namely, in heaven. A local church cannot consistently recognize any controlling organization such as a synod, presbytery, or council where control is exercised over a single church or a group of churches. Each assembly stands directly responsible to the Head of the Church, and should be nothing and do nothing that would deny that truth.

RECEPTION POLICY As pointed out previously, a third important truth in connection with the Church is that all believers are members of the body. It is the duty of the assembly to set forth this truth with accuracy and faithfulness. Nothing that it teaches or practices should deny the oneness of all Christians. If we inquire how the local church can witness to this, we shall find ourselves concerned with the policies it follows in receiving others into its fellowship. This subject is commonly known as reception policy, and the principles are clear.

1. THE GENERAL RULE The general principle is that the local church or assembly should receive all those whom Christ has received. "Wherefore receive ye one another as Christ also received us

to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). The basis of true fellowship is the fact that a person has already been received into the body of Christ. The local church merely gives visible expression to that fact by welcoming him into its midst.

2. EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

However, this is not a rule without exception. There are three additional requirements which are implicit in the teachings of the New Testament. The person received must be holy in life (1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 10:21). It would obviously give a very inaccurate representation of the holy character of the church to receive a fornicator, a covetous man, an idolater, a railer, a drunkard or an extortioner.

Closely associated with this is the fact it would be quite improper to receive a person who was at the time under discipline by another local church (1 Corinthians 5:13). This would be a denial of the unity of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4). Until an excommunicated person has been restored to fellowship with the Lord and with His people, he is counted as a heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:17).

Finally, the person must be sound as to the doctrine of Christ (2 John 1:10). “If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed”, The question arises here as to what is included in the doctrine of Christ. The expression is not explained in this passage, but we would suggest that the doctrine of Christ includes the great truths concerning His Person and Work: namely, His deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His substitutionary death, His burial, resurrection and ascension, and His coming again. To summarize then, we would conclude that a local church should receive into its fellowship all born-again believers who are holy in life, not under discipline by some other local church or assembly, and sound in doctrine.

3. OTHER PERTINENT RULES But the Scriptures give us some other instructions as to the matter of reception. The local assembly should:

1. Receive him who is weak in the faith (Romans 14:1). This refers to a Christian who is unduly scrupulous with regard to matters of moral indifference. The fact that he is a vegetarian, for instance, should not exclude him.
2. Receive without respect of persons (James 2:1-5). The Bible warns against showing special consideration to the rich, and despising the poor. This would apply too in the matter of race, social level, or culture. Discrimination is unchristian.
3. Receive on the basis of life, not light (Acts 9:26-38). Fellowship is not dependent on how much one knows, but rather on the Person whom he knows. Thus, Apollos was received in Ephesus, even though his knowledge was quite defective (Acts 18:24-28).
4. Receive on the basis of life, not of ordinance. Baptism is nowhere said to be the door into the local church. Though it is true that all believers should be baptized (Matthew 28:19), yet the moment we say that a person must be baptized in order to be received into fellowship, we have gone beyond the Word.
5. Receive on the basis of life, not service. Just because we might not agree with a Christian’s sphere of service is no reason for denying him the fellowship of the local church. In Luke 9:53, we read that the Samaritans would not receive the Lord Jesus because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. They were motivated by sectarianism rather than by divine principles.
6. Receive a person in spite of what he may have been before he was saved. Paul had been a persecutor, but he was received without

regard to his past history (Acts 9:27-28). Onesimus had been a thief, but Paul exhorts Philemon to receive him (Philemon 1:12; Philemon 1:15; Philemon 1:17). When an assembly's doors are closed to converted drunkards, gamblers, or outcasts, it has lost its true character as an available center of worship for God's people. 7. Receive believers in the Lord with gladness (Php 2:29). In a very real sense, the way we treat the weakest member of His body, is the way we treat the Lord Himself. "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren. ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

4. HOW TO KNOW IF A PERSON IS SAVED

Now the question invariably arises, "How is an assembly to know whether a person is really saved and eligible for fellowship? At least five possible approaches may be suggested. First, there is the use of letters of recommendation (Romans 16:1). A Christian travelling from one assembly to another can avoid considerable difficulty and embarrassment by carrying a letter from his home assembly, testifying to his faith and walk.

Then the testimony of two or three witnesses is acceptable (Matthew 18:16). If a person is known to two or more Christians in a local church, that church may receive him on their recommendation. The testimony of only one person, but one who has the confidence of the assembly, can be taken. Paul commended Phebe to the saints at Rome (Romans 16:1), and Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi (Php 2:28-30). A man's own reputation as a servant of Christ is sufficient (2 Corinthians 3:1-2). Paul disclaimed the necessity of a letter of commendation to the church at Corinth because he was well-known to them as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

There can be a careful inquiry and investigation by the assembly itself. By this is meant that an assembly, perhaps through the elders, may question a person as to his faith in Christ, etc., asking him to give a reason of the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15). They may then receive him after reasonable assurance that he belongs to Christ.

5. COMMON PROBLEMS

Before closing this section on reception, we should also consider three other questions which commonly arise in connection with this subject. Does the church have any right to judge whether a man is saved or not? The answer is that this is not only a right but a sacred obligation. Since Christians are forbidden to have fellowship with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 6:17), it is obvious that they are required to use every reasonable means to discern the spiritual status of those who seek a place among the people of God.

Suppose an assembly receives a man and he subsequently teaches error in the church? Then his teaching should be publicly refuted from the Word of God (1 Timothy 5:20). A New Testament church can only function in the environment of an open Bible. It should have godly elders who can expose error and defend the faith (Titus 1:9).

Suppose a local church receives a person, and he either attends irregularly thereafter, or never comes back? In the first place it should be emphasized that fellowship means sharing or holding things in common. Those in fellowship should enter into the life of the assembly, bear their load of responsibility, and share the work involved. Generally speaking, if a person attends only one service a week, he is limited in fellowship. Reception into a local church is in reality a reception

into the hearts and homes of the Christians making up the fellowship of that church. With regard to a person who is received but who never returns, the man himself is accountable. The assembly is responsible to present to him a faithful and spiritual representation of the Church. He is thereafter obligated to be obedient to the truth.

Obviously the subject of reception is a complicated one, and we have only been able to touch on some of its more important aspects. Recognizing the incompleteness of our coverage, we move on to the next major point.

01.07. The Holy Spirit in the Church

The Holy Spirit in the Church PRACTICAL GUIDANCE The assembly should seek His guidance in all its affairs' whether in choosing a location for its public testimony, arranging the types of meetings to be held, discerning the human instruments to be used in ministering the Word of God, disbursement of funds, or carrying on godly discipline. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SOVEREIGN The local church should ever recognize the sovereignty of the Spirit. By this we mean that He can do as He pleases, and that He will not always choose to do things in exactly the same way, though He will never act contrary to the Word. Some of the symbols of the Spirit used in the scriptures – fire, oil, water, wind speak of fluidity, of unpredictable behavior. Thus, wise Christians will be sufficiently elastic to allow Him this divine prerogative.

It was so in the early church, but soon people became uneasy with meetings that were “free and social, with the minimum of form.” Thus controls were added and formalism and ritualism took over. The Holy Spirit was quenched, and the church lost its power.

QUENCHING THE SPIRIT This shift from the freedom of the Spirit to human control has been described by James Denney eloquently. Though Mr. Denney writes at some length, the reader will find his article will richly repay study Commenting on the verse, “Quench not the Spirit,” (1 Thessalonians 5:19) he says: ‘When the Holy Spirit descended on the Church at Pentecost, there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them’; and their lips were opened to declare the mighty works of God. A man who has received this great gift is described as fervent, literally, boiling, with the Spirit. The new birth in those early days was a new birth; it kindled in the soul thoughts and feelings to which it had hitherto been strange; it brought with it the consciousness of new powers; a new vision of God; a new love of holiness; a new insight into the Holy Scriptures, and into the meaning of man’s life; often a new power of ardent, passionate speech. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians Paul describes a primitive Christian congregation. There was not one silent among them. When they came together every one had a psalm, a revelation, a prophecy, an interpretation. The manifestation of the Spirit had been given to each one to profit withal; and on all hands the spiritual fire was ready to flame forth. Conversion to the Christian faith, the acceptance of the apostolic Gospel, was not a thing which made little difference to men: it convulsed their whole nature to its depth; they were never the same again; they were new creatures, with a new life in them, all fervor and flame

“A state so unlike nature, in the ordinary sense of the term, was sure to have its inconveniences. The Christian, even when he had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, was still a man; and as likely as not a man who had to struggle against vanity, folly, ambition, and selfishness of all kinds. His enthusiasm might even seem, in the first instance, to aggravate, instead of removing, his natural faults. It might drive him to speak-for in a primitive church anybody who pleased might speak – when it would have been better for him to be silent. It might lead him to break out in prayer or praise or exhortation, in a style which made the wise sigh. And for those reasons the wise, and such as thought themselves wise, would be apt to discourage the exercise of spiritual gifts

altogether. 'Contain yourself,, they would say to the man whose heart burned within him, and who was restless till the flame could leap out; 'contain yourself; exercise a little self-control; it is unworthy of a rational being to be carried away in this fashion.'

"No doubt situations like this were common in the church at Thessalonica. They are produced inevitably by difference of age and of temperament. The old and the phlegmatic are a natural, and, doubtless, a providential, counterweight to the young and sanguine. But the wisdom which comes of experience and of temperament has its disadvantages as compared with fervor of spirit. It is cold and unenthusiastic; it cannot propagate itself; it cannot set fire to anything and spread. And because it is under this incapacity of kindling the souls of men into enthusiasm, it is forbidden to pour cold water on enthusiasm when it breaks forth in words of fire. That is the meaning of 'Quench not the Spirit.' The commandment presupposes that the Spirit can be quenched. Cold looks, contemptuous words, silence, studied disregard, go a long way to quench it. So does unsympathetic criticism.

"Everyone knows that a fire smokes most when it is newly kindled; but the way to get rid of the smoke is not to pour cold water on the fire, but to let it burn itself clear. If you are wise enough you may facilitate this by rearranging the materials, or securing a better draught; but the wisest thing most people can do when the fire has got hold is to let it alone; and that is also the wise course for most when they meet with a disciple whose zeal burns like fire. Very likely the smoke hurts their eyes; but the smoke will soon pass by; and it may well be tolerated in the meantime for the sake of heat. For this apostolic precept takes for granted that fervor of spirit, a Christian enthusiasm for what is good, is the best thing in the world. It may be untaught and inexperienced; it may have all its mistakes to make; it may be wonderfully blind to the limitations which the stern necessities of life put upon the generous hopes of man: but it is of God; it is expansive; it is contagious; it is worth more as a spiritual force than all the wisdom in the world.

"I have hinted at ways in which the Spirit is quenched, it is sad to reflect that from one point of view the history of the church is a long series of rebellions of the Spirit. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is,' the Apostle tells us elsewhere, 'there is liberty.' But liberty in a society has its dangers; It is, to a certain extent, at war with order; and the guardians of order are not apt to be too considerate of it. Hence it came to pass that at a very early period, and in the interests of good order, the freedom of the Spirit was summarily suppressed in the church. 'The gift of ruling,' it has been said, 'like Aaron's rod, seemed to swallow up the other gifts.' The rulers of the church became a class entirely apart from its ordinary members, and all exercise of spiritual gifts for the building up of the church was confined to them. Nay, the monstrous idea was originated, and taught as a dogma, that they alone were the depositaries, or, as it is sometimes said, the custodians, of the grace and truth of the gospel; only through them could men come into contact with the Holy Ghost. In plain English, the Spirit was quenched when Christians met for worship. One great extinguisher was placed over the flame that burned in the hearts of the brethren; it was not allowed to show itself; it must not disturb, by its eruption in praise or prayer or fiery exhortation, the decency and order of divine service.

I say that was the condition to which Christian worship was reduced at a very early period; and it is unhappily the condition in which, for the most part, it subsists at this moment. Do you think we are gainers by it? I do not believe it. It has always come from time to time to be intolerable. The

Montanists of the second century, the heretical sects of the middle ages, the Independents and Quakers of the English Commonwealth, the lay preachers of Wesleyanism, the Salvationists, the Plymouthists, and the Evangelistic associations of our own day, all these are in various degrees the protest of the Spirit, and its right and necessary protest, against the authority which would quench it, and by quenching it impoverish the church.” The assembly, then, should never fetter the Holy Spirit, either with unscriptural rules, stereotyped program, rituals, or liturgies. How grieved He must often be by rigid understandings that a meeting must end at a certain time, that a service must always follow a certain routine, that ministry at certain stages of a worship meeting IS quite unacceptable! Such regulations can only lead to a loss of spiritual power.

IF THE SPIRIT HAD HIS WAY TODAY

We might well pause to ask ourselves what it would be like in our local churches if the Holy Spirit were really depended on to be the Divine Leader. C. H. Mackintosh gives a vivid description of such a situation, and we reproduce it here:

“We have but little conception of what an assembly would be were each one distinctly led by the Holy Ghost, and gathered only to Jesus. We should not then have to complain of dull, heavy, unprofitable, trying meetings. We should have no fear of an unhallowed intrusion of mere nature and its restless doings—no making of prayer—no talking for talking’s sake—no hymnbook seized to fill a gap. Each one would know his place in the Lord’s immediate presence—each gifted vessel would be filled, fitted, and used by the Master’s hand—each eye would be directed to Jesus—each heart occupied with Him. If a chapter were read it would be the very voice of God. If a word were spoken, it would tell with power upon the heart. If prayer were offered, it would lead the soul into the very presence of God. If a hymn were sung, it would lift the spirit up to God, and be like sweeping the strings of the heavenly harp. We should feel ourselves in the very sanctuary of God and enjoy a foretaste of that time when we shall worship in the courts above and go no more out.”

01.08. Discipline in the Church

Discipline in the Church PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

First of all, it can do so by the godly lives of those who are associated with it. This is fundamental. God desires practical sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). This is why Church truths are not given as an isolated and distinct outline in any one section of the New Testament. Rather, they are found in many different places, and are interspersed with practical instruction for holy Christian living. The Lord does not simply want people who are outwardly correct in their church life, but those whose lives are testimonies to the truth. To that end the local church should provide a good diet of Bible teaching. This instruction should not consist of mere snatches from here and there, but of consecutive, systematic teaching of the word of God. Only in this way will the saints receive all the Word, and in the balance in which God has given it.

Though sound and systematic teaching will have a definite preventative effect as far as sin in an assembly is concerned, inevitably every local church will be called upon to take disciplinary action at one time or another. Whenever sin comes in to affect the peace of the assembly or its testimony in the community, action must be taken. "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17).

REASONS FOR ACTING Disciplinary action has two principal purposes:

- (1) To expose and expel from the fellowship professing Christians who are actually unregenerate—such people as are described in 1 John 2:19,
- (2) To deal with an erring believer in such a way as to bring about his restoration to the Lord and to the local church. Discipline of Christians is never an end in itself but always a means of effecting spiritual recovery.

DEGREES OF DISCIPLINE

Various degrees of discipline are described in the New Testament. In the case of a brother who sins against another, he should first be dealt with privately. If he will not listen, then one or two more persons should go to him. Failure to listen to this collective witness results in his being brought before the church. If this latter action should fail, then he is to be counted as an heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17).

Another form of discipline is a warning (1 Thessalonians 5:14). This is to be employed in the case of a brother who is unruly; that is, one who refuses to submit to those who are over him in the Lord.

Then we read that two classes of people are to be avoided: namely, a disorderly man (2 Thessalonians 3:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15), and one who causes divisions (Romans 16:17). The disorderly person is one who refuses to work, while the other creates divisions among God's people in order to attract a following and profit materially. An heretic should be rejected after the

first and second warning (Titus 3:10). (There is some question as to whether this is a less severe form of discipline, or whether it amounts to excommunication.)

Then there is the extreme form of discipline – excommunication from the church (1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 5:13). This is reserved for a one or more. Is the local church to be deemed indifferent or supine because it refuses to act on the testimony of a solitary witness? Nay, it would be flying in the face of a divine command were it to do so.

“And be it remembered that this great practical principle is not confined in its application to cases of discipline or questions connected with an assembly of the Lord’s people; it is of universal application. We should never allow ourselves to form a judgment or come to a conclusion without the divinely appointed measure of evidence; if that be not forthcoming, and if it be needful for us to judge in the case, God will, in due time, furnish the needed evidence. We have known a case in which a man was falsely accused because the accuser based his charge upon the evidence of one of his senses; had he taken the trouble of getting the evidence of one or two more of his senses, he would not have made the charge.”

HOW TO ADMINISTER DISCIPLINE

Another aspect of this subject that deserves careful consideration is the manner in which the discipline is carried out. For example, it should be accomplished in the spirit of meekness, considering one’s self, lest he also be tempted (Galatians 6:1). Also, it should be strictly impartial. The fact that a wrongdoer is related to us by ties of nature, for instance should in no wise influence our decision in the matter. Respect of persons must not be shown (Deuteronomy 1:17; James 2:1). In the case of excommunication, it should be the action of the church, and not of any one person (2 Corinthians 2:6). We refer once again to C. H. Mackintosh for the spirit in which this form of discipline should be effected. He says: “Nothing can be more solemn or affecting than the act of putting away a person from the Lord’s table. It is the last sad and unavoidable act of the whole assembly, and it should be performed with broken hearts and weeping eyes. Alas how often it is otherwise! How often does this most solemn and holy duty take the form of a mere official announcement that such a person is out of fellowship. Need we wonder that discipline, so carried out, fails to tell with power upon the erring one, or upon the church.

“How then should the discipline be carried out? Just as 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 directs. When the case is so patent, so clear, that all discussion and all deliberation is at an end, the whole church should be solemnly convened for the special purpose—for, most assuredly, it is of sufficient gravity and importance to command a special meeting. All should, if possible, attend, and seek grace to make the sin their own, to go down before God in true self-judgment, and ‘eat the sin-offering.’ The church is not called to deliberate or discuss. The case should be thoroughly investigated, and all the facts collected by those who care for the interests of Christ and His church; and when it is thoroughly settled, and the evidence perfectly conclusive, then the whole church is called to perform, in deep sorrow and humiliation, the sad act of putting away from among themselves the evil doer. It is an act of holy obedience to the Lord’s command.”

Finally it should not need emphasis that Christians should not broadcast the sin of their fellows, but rather throw a kindly cloke of secrecy around the sin and its discipline, as far as outsiders are concerned.

CONCLUSION

Only as the church takes resolute action when sin is discovered can it hope to maintain its true character as a miniature of the holy temple of God.

Perhaps it should be added here that the New Testament assumes every believer to be attached to some local church; otherwise he would be free from the discipline of any assembly, and such a freedom would be fraught with the gravest perils for the individual.

01.09. Expansion of the Church

Expansion of the Church

GIFTS FOR TODAY

It was mentioned earlier that originally there were five gifts - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. It was suggested that the first two were concerned primarily with the foundation of the Church, and that, in general, the need for them passed when the complete Word of God was given in written form. That means that we have three gifts today - evangelists, pastors, and teachers. However, the probability is that the "pastor-teacher" gift is just one gift, in which case only two of the gifts would be operative today. We turn now to the purpose of the gifts and how they function.

WHY GIFTS ARE GIVEN The purpose of the gifts is set forth in Ephesians 4:12-13. "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 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."

Now upon first reading this verse in our King James Version of the Bible, one would think that these are three separate reasons why the gifts were given: namely (1) for the perfecting of the saints, (2) for the work of the ministry, (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ.

However, is this what the passage teaches? A study of other versions reveals that it is not. The Revised Version, for instance, indicates that in the second and third instances of the use of the word "for" the word is better translated "unto." The verse then reads, "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering unto the building up of the body of Christ." This then reveals not three reasons why the gifts were given, but rather one reason alone - to build up the saints in the faith, so that they in turn can do the work of ministering (or serving), so that the body of Christ will be built up numerically and spiritually. It is the saints who are to do the work of ministering. **THE TRUTH ILLUSTRATED**

We might illustrate this truth by a diagram (Figure 1). The circle in the center depicts, let us say, the gift of a teacher. He ministers to those in the circle around him, so that they become perfected (that is, built up in the faith), and they then go forth to minister to others. In this way the church grows and expands. It is the divine method of reaching the greatest number of people in the shortest possible time.

According to this divine pattern, the evangelists and pastors and teachers always have in view the idea of reaching, training, and equipping others to do the work of ministering.

Although not every Christian has the gift of an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher, yet every one is expected to engage in Christian service. Every member of the Church should be a worshipper, a soul winner, a Bible student, a propagator of the faith. This important obligation is further stressed in 2 Timothy 2:2. "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same

commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

Once again this can be illustrated by a diagram (Figure 2).

Now this plan produces benefits that are apparent at once. It results in a rapid expansion of the Christian faith. Individual Christians become mature through exercising their God-given functions. By thus becoming mature, they are less susceptible to the teachings of the false cults so current in the world today. And the Church thus expanding and maturing gives a more accurate representation of the body of Christ upon earth. **THE SYSTEM COMMON TO CHRISTENDOM**

Contrast with this, the system which is so common in Christendom today. One man is selected as minister of a church. He preaches the sermons, baptizes the converts, conducts the communion service, and otherwise generally performs most of the religious duties of the congregation. The people listen to the sermons faithfully week after week, but in an unfortunately large number of cases, would be quite unwilling to assume any active participation, reasoning that they are paying someone else to do this for them. Too often they become, in short, sermon-tasters, with little real personal acquaintance with the truths of God’s Word. And the ever-present danger is that these people, reared in an evangelical environment, remain mere “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). The present system we are speaking about may be illustrated in Figure 3.

Here the minister has his congregation and they dutifully attend the services; but having done so, they go back to their occupations, with little or no personal responsibility to do anything about what they have heard. Obviously what one minister can do in such a situation is very limited. On the other hand, if all or most of those people were active for the Lord, the progress would be remarkable.

It was such considerations that caused Alexander Maclaren to write: “I cannot but believe that the present practice of confining the public teaching of the church to an official class has done harm. Why should one man be for ever speaking, and hundreds of people who are able to teach, sitting dumb to listen or pretend to listen to him? I hate forcible revolution, and do not believe that any institutions, either political or ecclesiastical, which need violence to sweep them away, are ready to be removed; but I believe that if the level of spiritual life were raised among us, new forms would naturally be evolved, in which there should be a more adequate recognition of the great principle on which the democracy of Christianity is founded: namely, “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh—and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in these days of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy. **THE CLERICAL SYSTEM EXAMINED** This discussion of one-man ministry brings to the front the questions, “What about the clerical system? Is it scriptural? We shall now seek an answer to these pertinent queries. By the clergy we mean a separate class of men humanly ordained to the service of God, and, in addition to preaching and teaching, usually given sole authority to perform the rites and ordinances of the church. At the outset we would gladly recognize that many men who have held the clerical position have been outstanding servants of Christ and have been wonderfully used of Him. To many of them and their ministry, both oral and written, we owe a profound debt of gratitude which we gladly acknowledge. All such believers in the Lord Jesus, we readily embrace as our brethren. But we must face honestly and squarely the fact that the idea of a clergyman is not found in the New Testament. Nowhere does one find one

man in charge of a church. (At the end of the epistle to Titus, the subscription says, "It was written to Titus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, from Nicopolis of Macedonia." However, no one contends that this footnote was part of the original text. It was added by the translators, who, of course, were biased in favor of clericalism. The Revised Version omits the note altogether.) WHAT DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT SAY? Not only is the idea of the clergy unsupported by the New Testament, but, we believe, it is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament.

First of all, it violates the principle of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9). In the Old Testament, there was a separate caste of men standing between God and the people. In Christianity, all believers are priests, with all the privileges and responsibilities that go with priesthood. In practice, the idea of a one-man ministry effectively silences the worship and hinders the service of Christian priests.

Secondly, the clerical system often prohibits the free exercise of gifts in the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-31; 1 Corinthians 14:1-40), by arbitrarily limiting ministry to one person or an official group of persons.

Again, it often confines the administration of the ordinances to a priestly caste, whereas Scripture makes no such distinction. The principle of salaried ministry, which almost invariably accompanies the clerical system, inevitably involves responsibility to some higher person or persons. This higher authority may exert pressure on a minister by imposing artificial and unspiritual standards of attainment. For instance, it is common to judge a man's effectiveness by the number of persons added to the church roll during the year. Not only is this not a true measure of effective ministry, but it creates the strong temptation to lower the standards of reception in order to make a better showing. The servant of Christ should not thus be bound, fettered, and hampered. He should ever be the Lord's free man (Galatians 1:10).

Clerisy caters to the ever present danger of gathering people to a man instead of to the Name of the Lord. If a man is the attracting power in a local church, then the attraction is gone when the man leaves. If on the other hand the saints gather because the Lord is there, then they will be faithful because of Him. In practice, if not in theory, the clergy has served to obscure effectively the truth of the headship of Christ (Ephesians 1:22), and in some cases to deny it completely.

If it be contended that the bishops of the New Testament are the same as the clergy of today, we would reply that the New Testament contemplates several bishops in one church (Php 1:1), and not one bishop presiding over a church or a group of churches.

It is undeniable that many men in the clerical position are gifted servants of Christ to the Church. However, they did not become gifts by human appointment or ordination but by the work of the Lord Jesus Himself. They are responsible to so minister that the saints will be built up for active service, and not so that the saints will become perpetually dependent on them. The evils that have flowed from human ordination of men who were not called of God are manifest and need no elaboration here.

Finally where one man is primarily responsible for the teaching ministry of the church, there is no system of checks and balances, and thus there is a danger of one-sided interpretations, if not of evil doctrine itself. Where the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, has liberty to speak through various

gifts in the church, more facets of the truth are brought to light, and there is greater immunity from error where all the saints are assiduously comparing Scripture with Scripture.

CONCLUSION

Thus, though much blessing has often flowed from the ministry of men representing the clerical system, we believe that it is not only not God's best but that it is seriously detrimental to the best interests of the Church.

God's way is for the gifts to minister to the saints, then for the saints in turn to go forth to do the work of the ministry. The local assembly should recognize this important principle, and do nothing to hinder its free development. As the saints thus minister, unbelievers will be saved, saints will be edified, and new assemblies will be brought into being.

01.10. Ordained of God

Ordained of God THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS The seventh and final truth concerning the Church which we listed at the outset was that all believers are priests of God. Every local assembly should witness to this truth practically by refusing any other priesthood and by encouraging every believer to exercise the privileges and responsibilities of this sacred office, both individually and collectively.

1. A Contrast In the old Testament, the law of Moses set aside the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron to be the priests of the nation. These men had distinctive dress, were given special privileges, and stood as a separate caste between God and the congregation of Israel. They alone could enter the holy place, and only they could offer the sacrifices prescribed by the law. In Christianity all this changed. Now all believers are priests, according to the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:5 states, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:9 says, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Revelation 1:5-6 declares, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

Martin Luther earnestly contended for the truth of the priesthood of all believers. He wrote: “All believers are altogether priests, and let it be anathema to assert that there is any other priest than he who is Christian; for it will be asserted without the Word of God, on no authority but the sayings of men, or the antiquity of custom, or the multitude of those that think so.”

2. Our Sacrifices

Among the important duties of a priest is that of offering sacrifice. In the old Testament the sacrifices usually consisted of slain animals. Today, a believer offers the sacrifice of his body (Romans 12:1). This is not a dead offering, but “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” He also offers his material resources (Hebrews 13:16). “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

Then, too, there is the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto His Name.” This sacrifice of praise should be both individual and collective. The latter—collective worship—in which believers are at liberty to take part in public praise has been practically eliminated by the stereotyped, controlled services of our day. The result is a generation of silent priests in the gatherings of God's people.

3. Other Priestly Duties

Other duties of a priest include prayer, testimony for God, and care for His people. Thus, believers should continually be exercising this sacred office. Eric Sauer says: "The teaching of all Scripture on this subject (Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18; John 16:13), makes clear that it has to be applied to our whole life from morning till evening, and every day in the week, not only the Lord's Day. It is certainly not limited to the beginning and ending of church gatherings, such as meetings for worship, Bible reading, or prayer, but includes the whole man, not only in but also outside the meeting-rooms, halls, chapels, and church buildings. In this full sense of the word the whole New Testament people of God is 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5-9).

4. Our Great High Priest

Although it is true that all believers are priests, it is also true that every Christian needs a priest. He finds that need fully met in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews sets forth that blessed One as the Great High Priest, One who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities because He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

5. What Christendom Has Done

Every local church then should recognize the Lord Jesus as the Great High Priest, and every believer as a holy and royal priest. But is this what we find in Christendom today? On the contrary, we find that the Church has gone back to the priestly system of Judaism. While professing to believe in the priesthood of all Christians, many churches have set up a distinct priesthood of their own, based largely on the Mosaic system. Thus we have a separate class of men set apart for divine service, a hierarchy of church officials with high-sounding titles that distinguish them from the laity, and distinctive garb to set these men apart as being of a different order. In addition, the church has borrowed from Judaism such concepts as consecrated buildings with their elaborate altars, ecclesiastical adornments, and material aids to worship, an impressive ritual that appeals to the natural senses, and a religious calendar with its holy days and seasons.

Concerning this mixture of Judaism and Christianity, Dr. C. I. Scofield commented: "It may safely be said that the Judaizing of the church has done more to hinder her progress, pervert her mission, and destroy her spirituality, than all other causes combined. Instead of pursuing her appointed path of separation from the world and following the Lord in her heavenly calling, she has used Jewish Scriptures to justify herself in lowering her purpose to the civilization of the world, the acquisition of wealth, the use of an imposing ritual, the erection of magnificent churches, the invocation of God's blessing upon the conflicts of armies, and the division of an equal brotherhood into 'clergy, and 'laity.'

6. What Should Be Done? Is not God calling upon His people today to separate themselves from this religion of types and shadows, in order that they might find their sufficiency in the Name of the Lord Jesus?

Only such a church is fully realizing its share in the New Testament general priesthood which is, to quote Erich Sauer, "A local church with Spirit-filled, regularly well-attended prayer meetings;

"A local church with members who are practical helpers and fellow-workers with the Lord's servants in the world-wide harvest field;

“A local church with persevering, energetic activity in the preaching of the Gospel, by tract distribution, personal witness, and, wherever possible, open-air meetings;

“A local church with a warm-hearted, spiritual atmosphere of love, where everyone tries to help the other by mutual care and charity in a prayerful spirit, considering one another to provoke unto love and good works.

“In such a local church the gatherings and services also will be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as distributed by the Lord Himself, will be developed in their God-appointed variety, in brotherly fellowship, in dependence upon Christ, and thus in holy freedom of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Corinthians 14:26). And when the church is gathered together at the Lord’s Table praising the priestly sacrifice on Golgotha, priestly worship will rise up to the heavenly Sanctuary, thus crowning the privilege of the general priesthood of the church.”

7. Looking Ahead With this section on priesthood, we bring to a close our study of seven vital truths concerning the universal Church which every local church should seek to portray and practice. Needless to say, other truths could be mentioned, but these are sufficient to show that the assembly should be a replica or miniature of all that is true of the entire body of Christ. In the pages to follow we shall deal with the ordinances of the church, the prayer meeting, the bishops and deacons, the finances of the church, and the ministry of women. There will be a concluding lesson entitled, “Let Us Go Forth Unto Him!”

BAPTISM The two ordinances of the Christian Church are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We find these instituted in the Gospels (Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:19-20); practiced in the Acts Acts 10:47-48; Acts 20:7); and expounded in the Epistles (Romans 6:3-10; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

1. Three Baptisms In considering the subject of baptism, we should notice at the outset that there are three main forms of baptism in the New Testament.

First of all, there is the baptism of John (Mark 1:4). As the forerunner of the coming King, John called upon the nation of Israel to repent and to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance (Matthew 3:8). Those who came to him, confessing their sins, were baptized unto repentance, and they thus separated themselves from the ungodly condition of the nation. The Lord Jesus was baptized by John, not because He had sins of which to repent, but in order to identify Himself with the repentant remnant of Israel, and fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

Secondly, there is believer’s baptism (Romans 6:3-4). This signifies identification with Christ in His death, and will be discussed in detail later.

Thirdly, there is the baptism in the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is that act of God whereby all believers are baptized in one Spirit into the body of Christ.

2. Significant Contrasts In connection with these three baptisms, it should be carefully noted that John’s baptism is not the same as Spirit baptism. These are clearly distinguished in Matthew 3:11. John’s baptism is not the same as believer’s baptism. Acts 19:1-5 shows that those who were already baptized as John’s disciples were re-baptized with Christian baptism. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not the same as believer’s baptism. Many have a vague idea that water baptism is a picture or portrayal of Spirit baptism. Actually they are entirely distinct. Spirit baptism speaks of

incorporation into Christ's body, whereas believer's baptism is a type of death. In short, all these three forms of baptism are different, and should not be confused.

3. Believer's Baptism

There is no mention in the New Testament, after the day of Pentecost, of any persons being baptized except those who were believers in the Lord Jesus. Note the following—"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized," (Acts 2:41). "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). It is true that households are mentioned as being baptized (Acts 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16); but there is no evidence to suppose that these households included anyone, young or old, who had never trusted the Lord Jesus.

4. The Significance of It The principal meaning of believer's baptism is most fully developed in Romans 6:1-10. We might summarize the teaching of that passage as follows. When Jesus died, He went, as it were, under the waves and billows of God's wrath (Psalms 42:7). He did this as our Representative. Because Christ really died in our place, we can say that when He died, we died. By dying, He settled the whole question of sin once and for all. Therefore, we too have died to the whole question of sin. Sin no longer has any claim on us. God sees every believer as having been crucified with Christ. All that he- was as a sinner in the flesh has been nailed to the cross. In baptism, the believer gives a dramatic illustration of what has already taken place. In going under the water, he is saying in effect, "Because of my sins, I deserved to die. But when Jesus died, I died too. My old man, or old self, was crucified with Him. When Jesus was buried, I too was buried, and I now acknowledge that my old self should be put away from God's sight forever as a matter of daily practice." Then just as Jesus arose from the dead, so the believer arises out of the waters of baptism. In so doing, he signifies his determination to walk in newness of life. No longer will he live to please self, but rather he will turn over his life to the Savior so that He can live His life in the believer.

Thus we might say that baptism is an ordinance signifying the end of the former way of life. It is a public act of obedience to the will of the Lord (Matthew 28:19-20), picturing the believer's death with Christ. It has no saving merit, but is for those who are already saved.

5. The Method

Endless controversy has arisen over the question as to how baptism should be administered - whether by sprinkling or by immersion. The following facts are helpful in seeking a solution. The word "baptize" comes from a Greek word meaning "to dip, plunge, wash." In connection with the baptism of Christ, we read, "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water," (Matthew 3:16). John himself was baptizing in Aenon, near to Salim, "because there was much water there" (John 3:23). At the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, the Scripture is careful in noting that "they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip . . ." (Acts 8:38-39). We saw above (Romans 6:3) that baptism is a likeness or picture of burial. Sprinkling does not convey any likeness of burial, whereas immersion does so most accurately.

6. The Important Thing But even more important than the mode of baptism is the heart condition of the person being baptized. There are thousands of persons who have been immersed in water,

but who have not been really baptized. The truly baptized person is the one who has not only gone through the outward ordinance, but whose life shows that the flesh, or old nature, has been put in the place of death. Baptism must be a matter of the heart, as well as an outward profession. This may be expressed rather pointedly by paraphrasing Romans 2:25-29 to refer to baptism instead of circumcision.

“Baptism indeed profiteth if thou be an obeyer of the Gospel; but if thou be a refuser of a Gospel-walk, then baptism is become non-baptism. If therefore, an un-baptized person obeys the Gospel, shall not his non-baptism be reckoned for baptism? And shall not un-baptized persons, if they obey the Gospel, judge thee, who with the letter and baptism, art a refuser of a Gospel-walk. For he is not a Christian who is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God.”

7. Administering the Rite The idea that a man must be an ordained minister in order to baptize is unscriptural. Any man who is a believer may baptize others.

COUNTING THE COST In the early days of the church, when a believer was baptized, he was often persecuted and murdered in a short time. Yet whenever others were saved, they unhesitatingly stepped forward to fill up the ranks of the martyrs by being baptized.

Even today in certain areas, baptism is often the signal for the beginning of terrible persecution. In many countries, a believer is tolerated as long as he only confesses Christ with his lips. But whenever he publicly confesses Christ in baptism and severs his ties with the past, the enemies of the cross take up their battle against him. Yet whatever the cost may be, each one who is baptized enjoys the same experience as the Ethiopian eunuch, of whom it is written, “He went on his way rejoicing.”

01.11. Coming to God

Coming to God THE LORD'S SUPPER This solemn act of remembrance was instituted by the Lord Jesus on the night of His betrayal. Immediately after He had celebrated the last Passover with His disciples, He introduced what we know as the Lord's supper. "He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.' Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.' "(Luke 22:19-20).

1. Why Keep the Feast? With regard to the significance of this ordinance, certain facts are presented. First, it is an occasion for remembrance. The Savior said, "This do in remembrance of Me." It is a time to remember His sufferings and death, the giving of His body, the shedding of His blood. Here Calvary with all its sacred associations passes before the minds of the participants. It is quite impossible thus to remember the passion of the Lord Jesus without responding to God with worship and praise. Thus the Lord's supper is a time of public worship, a time of adoring God for all He is and all He has done.

Then again, the Lord's supper is a public witness to the unity of the body of Christ. The loaf of bread is a picture of the body of Christ, made up of all true believers. In partaking of the bread, the believer testifies that he is one with every true child of God. In drinking of the cup, he acknowledges that he is one with everyone who has been cleansed by the precious blood (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Finally, the Lord's supper is a constant reminder that the One who instituted this memorial of Himself is coming again. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Thus, the worshipper not only looks back to Golgotha and remembers Him in His death, he not only looks upward to the Throne of God and praises Him for an accomplished redemption, but he also looks forward to that moment when the Lord will descend from heaven and take His waiting people home.

2. As Oft As Ye Do With regard to the time and frequency of the Lord's supper, the Scriptures do not command in the language of law, but entreat with the voice of grace. In Acts 20:7, it is stated that "upon the first day of the week, . . . the disciples came together to break bread." The first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Sunday. It is the day of the Lord's resurrection and a fitting day for His people to meet together for worship and remembrance. The instruction is, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The moment a person says it must be observed every week, or month, or quarter, he has gone beyond what the Bible says. At the same time, the probability is very strong that the early disciples met every week to remember the Lord.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon argued strongly for a weekly observance of the Lord's supper. "My witness is, and I think I speak the mind of many of God's people now present, that coming as some of us do, weekly, to the Lord's Table, we do not find the breaking of bread to have lost its significance—it is always fresh to us. I have often remarked on the Lord's day, whatever the

subject may have been, whether Sinai has thundered over our heads, or the plaintive notes of Calvary have pierced our hearts, it always seems equally appropriate to come to the breaking of bread. Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month, and mar the first day of the week by depriving it of its glory in the meeting together for fellowship and breaking of bread, and showing forth the death of Christ till He come. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord's day celebrating His supper will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons."

Jonathan Edwards also was an advocate of a weekly remembrance of the Lord. "It seems plain by the Scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the sufferings of their dear Redeemer every Lord's Day, and so I believe it will be again in the church of Christ in days that are approaching."

3. Eligibility

It should scarcely need to be mentioned that the Lord's supper is only for Christians. Only those who have been redeemed are eligible and capable of entering into its sacred meaning. Christians themselves should partake of the emblems in a judged condition (1 Corinthians 11:28). Sin must be confessed and forsaken, and the emblems must be taken in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:21-22). All who partake without judging themselves are in danger of being chastened by the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27; 1 Corinthians 11:29-32).

Here again it is good to remind ourselves that it is possible to eat the bread and drink the wine without really remembering the Lord. It is possible to reduce this ordinance to a mere ritual if our heart does not answer to what we are doing in symbol. Our lives must be in fellowship with God if we are truly to obey His words, "Remember me."

PRAYER Not very much information is given in the New Testament concerning the meetings of the local church. we do know that the Christians assembled for fellowship, prayer, ministry of the Word, and breaking of bread (Acts 2:42); but beyond that there seems to be a veil. As far as gospel testimony is concerned, that appears to have been carried on by the individual Christian outside the confines of the assembly, wherever the unsaved could be reached, but always with the idea of bringing the ones who were saved into the fellowship of a local church. In all the gatherings of the early assemblies, certainly nothing was more prominent than prayer. In fact, the church was born in the wake of prayer (Acts 1:14), and thereafter the Christians "continued steadfastly in prayer" (Acts 2:42). The Book of Acts presents numerous instances of prayer, at all times and in all places. Indeed, the entire history of the church is a tribute to the faithfulness of God who answers prayer.

1. A Special Promise

We do well to remind ourselves constantly that collective prayer not only has divine sanction, but carries with it a special promise of the presence of the Lord Himself. In Matthew 18:19-20, we read, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Language could scarcely be clearer than this. We have a twofold pledge that cannot be broken. First, when two believers are united in presenting a petition to God, that request is answered. Secondly, when Christians are

gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, He is there in their midst. The trouble is that we do not believe it. If we did, our prayer meetings would be filled, and our churches would be on fire for God.

2. How to Pray as a Group In considering the subject of collective prayer, we should like at the outset to present a few elementary facts concerning it. First of all, in a prayer meeting, one person leads at a time. The others are silent, but actually all are praying. The one whose voice is audible is expressing the prayers of the group. The others follow him as he prays, and makes his prayer their own. Oftentimes they express this unity of spirit by saying "Amen." Next, we want to mention that there is a big difference between "saying prayers" and praying. There is a children's hymn which makes this distinction:

I often say my prayers, But do I ever pray? And do the wishes of my heart Go with the words I say?

I may as well kneel down And worship gods of stone As offer to the living God A prayer of words alone. For words without the heart, The Lord will never hear, Nor will He to those lips attend, Whose prayers are not sincere.

There is nothing that will kill a prayer meeting more quickly than a series of rehearsed prayers where there is no real heart interest. Too often we just go through a list of empty petitions. The prayers of young converts are usually refreshing because they are spontaneous and fresh. But older Christians frequently fall into a pattern of prayer that is useless for God or man. It has been well said, "Meetings where prayers are offered from a sense of duty only, need closing down."

Another danger that should be avoided is long prayers. It is true that Scripture says "Pray without ceasing," but this does not authorize an individual to monopolize the time in the prayer meeting. If the prayers are short and many men take part, the interest will be increased.

Then, too, our requests should be specific. Do not pray, "God, save many souls throughout the world." Better pray, "Lord, save my brother, David." Then when David is saved, you will know your prayer has been answered and you will be encouraged to pray for others by name.

3. Be Specific

There is no reason why any prayer meeting should be a dull affair. There are plenty of specific requests which we can bring to the Throne of Grace. Here are a few of them.

Pray for those who are in authority over us, mentioning them by name. Pray that they might be saved, and that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty (1 Timothy 2:2).

Pray for those who are sick in your church. The Lord knows who they are, but maybe some of the Christians don't, so give their names.

Pray for unsaved relatives and friends. We should never be ashamed to have our loved ones mentioned in the prayer meeting. If we really want them to be saved, we will welcome the prayer support of the church.

Pray for the elders in the church. They have important responsibilities which require wisdom and patience. They deserve an interest in your supplications.

Pray for missionaries who have gone out from your local church. If you correspond with them from time to time, you will know what problems they are facing and what their needs might be.

Pray for the Sunday School, for its superintendent, for the teachers, and for the boys and girls who are being taught the Word of God.

Pray for the poor. If it would cause embarrassment to anyone present, it might be better to withhold names in this instance.

Pray for the men and women from your assembly in the armed forces. They face dangers, temptations and trials. They need your prayers.

Pray for those who are engaged in the work of the Lord, such as evangelists and teachers.

Then in your prayers be sure to include thanksgiving. This is forcefully brought before us in Php 4:6. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." The Lord rightfully expects His people to be thankful. Ingratitude for all His mercies is sin.

4. Important Conditions But are there not conditions that must be observed if our prayers are to be answered? Indeed there are!

First, we must abide in Christ. He said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Abiding in Christ is keeping His commandments, doing His will, obeying His Word.

Secondly, our prayers should be according to His will. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). Since the general outline of God's will is found in the Bible, our requests should be scriptural.

Third, our requests should be offered in the Name of Christ. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). When we truly ask in His Name, it is the same as if He were making the request to God.

Finally, our motives must be pure. James reminds us that we ask and receive not because we ask amiss, that we may consume it upon our lusts (James 4:3). If our motives are selfish and sinful, we cannot expect an answer.

5. A Few Rules to Remember

There are a few more do's and don't's which should be mentioned if our prayer meetings are going to be "the power-house of the church." For instance, do not pray to be seen. The hypocrites, you remember, love to stand praying in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men (Matthew 6:5). Again, do not ask God to do something you can do yourself. We ask God to bring the unsaved into our Gospel meetings. Does He not expect us to use our lips to invite them and our cars to bring them? And be careful that you do not ask for something you know you should not

have. God sometimes grants such requests but sends leanness to the soul (Psalms 106:15). Do not be discouraged if the answer does not come immediately. God's answers are never too early lest we miss the blessedness of waiting upon Him; they are never too late lest we fear we have trusted Him in vain. Then, if God's answer is not just exactly what you asked for, remember this! The Lord reserves the right to give us something better than we ask for. We do not know what is best for us, but He does, and so He gives us more than we could ever ask or think.

Finally let us emphasize that there can be no real progress in the church without prayer. We can go through a routine, and produce even seeming results, but nothing is accomplished for God apart from intercession. If we do not see this conclusion from the Scriptures, we will be soon driven to it by sheer necessity.

01.12. The Bishops

The Bishops

First of all, we must distinguish between the New Testament concept of a bishop, and the title as it is used today. In the apostolic church, a bishop was simply one of several mature Christians in a local church who cared for the spiritual welfare of that church. Today, in church systems, a bishop is an appointed dignitary who has many churches under his jurisdiction. Barnes says: "The word bishop in the New Testament never means what is now commonly understood by it—a Prelate. It does not denote here (i.e. in 1 Timothy 3:1-16) or anywhere else in the New Testament, one who has charge over a diocese composed of a certain district of country embracing a number of churches with their clergy." In the New Testament, the bishops were not a class of men, mediating between God and man. Perhaps it was as a rebuke to such pretension as might arise in the future that the Spirit of God listed the bishops second, not first, when Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus . . . with the bishops and deacons." In the New Testament, the thought of officialism is absent. Instead of a lofty office with magnificent titles, we are pointed to humble service among the people of God. Thus we read, "If any one is eager for oversight, he is desirous of a good work." Overseership is work, not dignity of office.

Finally, we would notice, by way of introduction, that the words, "bishop," "elder," "overseer" and "presbyter" all refer to the same person in the New Testament. This can be demonstrated by the following comparisons of Scripture with Scripture. In Acts 20:17, we find a reference made to the "elders," of the church. The margin of the Revised Version indicates that this word is the same as "presbyters." Then in Acts 20:28, these same "elders" or "presbyters" are called "overseers." Here the word "overseers" is translated "bishops," in the Revised Version. In Titus 1:5, Paul instructs Titus to ordain "elders"; he then immediately (v. 7) proceeds to give the qualifications of a "bishop," indicating again that "elders" are the same as "bishops."

HOW BISHOPS ARE SELECTED?

Now let us consider the question of how elders are selected or appointed. In the final analysis, only the Holy Spirit can make a man an elder (Acts 20:28). A church may meet in solemn session to appoint elders, but their vote does not put within a man the heart of an overseer. The scriptural order would seem to be that God makes men overseers, then as they carry on their work, the church recognizes them as divinely-appointed bishops.

If it be argued that Paul and others appointed bishops (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), we would simply say that this was before the New Testament was available in written form in the churches. In the absence of written instructions as to the qualifications of elders, the churches had to depend on these apostles or apostolic delegates. It should also be noted that Paul never ordained elders on his first visit to a church. Rather he allowed time for those elders whom God had ordained to manifest themselves by their work. Then he singled them out for recognition by the church. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A BISHOP The Scriptures leave us in no doubt as to the qualifications of a

true bishop or elder. These are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:6-9.

First of all, the bishop must be blameless. As to his reputation, he must be above reproach. It does not say he must be sinless, but blameless. If a public accusation can be proved against a man, he should refrain from assuming the duties of an overseer. Secondly, he must be the husband of one wife. Some understand this to mean that he must be a married man. Others see in it a prohibition against a polygamist ever becoming an elder. We can definitely say that the latter is true, but it is hard to be dogmatic on the first. Next, he must be vigilant. The Revised Version tells that this means temperate. He must not be a man given to excess. Some persons find it hard to be moderate. They are always going to extremes. Such men may be in the church, but they may not be overseers. The elder must be sober, or sober-minded. He must evidence by his life that Christianity is not a pleasant pastime, a frivolous trifle. The elder grapples with eternal issues. He must be of good behavior, or a better rendering would be "orderly." Carelessness or slipshod methods are unbecoming to one who would serve in a house of order. Next, we read, "given to hospitality," or "a lover of hospitality." His home should be open to the Lord's people. It should be like the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha in Bethany—a place where Jesus loved to be. The bishop should be apt to teach. Although he might not be an outstandingly gifted teacher, still he should be sufficiently proficient in handling the Scriptures to be able to help the people of God with problems as they arise.

He must not be addicted to wine, or as another translation renders it, he must not be a brawler. The two are closely allied. Any man who cannot control his own appetite surely is not worthy of a place of trust in the church.

He must not be a striker. The literal meaning is that he must not use violence on others. To strike a servant, for instance, would be inconsistent with eldership. He must not be greedy of filthy lucre. The true bishop understands that money is to be used for the Lord and for the advancement of His interests. A grasping, greedy Christian is a paradox. He must be patient. His Master was gentle, and the servant is not above his Master. Meekness and patience may not be virtues in the secular world, but they still are in the Kingdom of God. He must not be a brawler, or contentious. Some are ready to fight and to argue over matters of little consequence. Not so a bishop. Then, again, he must not be covetous. To covet is to want something which God never intended one to have. Covetousness is idolatry, because it puts one's will above the will of God. The elder must rule his own house well, having his children in subjection with all gravity—children who believe, and who are not accused of riot or unruly. The necessity for this requirement is obvious. "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5). He must not be a novice. This is implied in the name "elder." Spiritual maturity is necessary. A man may be old in years, and yet not be qualified for spiritual oversight because of lack of experience as a Christian. The danger is that a novice becomes lifted up with pride, and falls into the condemnation of the devil. He must have a good report of them that are without. The world should know that he is a man of Christian character and integrity. He must not be self-willed, not soon angry, a lover of that which is good. He must be just and holy. Finally, he must hold fast the faithful word; that is, he must be a defender of the faith. To summarize the qualifications of an elder, we might say that he must be able to control himself, he must be able to control his own home, and he must be a contender for the truth of God. Now it should be noted that the Bible does not say the bishop must be an ordained clergyman. It does not say he must have a college degree. It does not

say he must be a successful businessman. It is not of importance whether he is prominent in the community. Nothing is said about his personal appearance or the size of his bank balance. He might be a hunch-backed, ungainly, poor, old street-sweeper, and still be an elder in the church of God. Let us ponder this seriously. Doubtless one of the greatest blights on the church today is the recognition of men as elders who do not have the spiritual qualifications. Because a man has been successful in business, he is catapulted into a place of leadership in the church, even though he may have little or no spirituality. The result is an abundance of whatever money will buy and an absence of spiritual power. THE DUTIES OF A BISHOP

What are the duties of elders? First of all they are to feed the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). They do this by ministering the Word of God. It does not necessarily imply public ministry, but may be by visitation from house to house.

Secondly, they are to do the work of overseers. "Taking the oversight thereof," Peter writes. What does this mean? The rest of the passage explains what it does not mean, and what it does mean. It does not mean serving by constraint. This must be a willing service. It does not mean working for monetary gain. Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. It does not mean fording it over God's heritage. The elder is not a dictator, not a taskmaster, not a boss. But it does mean being an example to the flock. The elder must remember that the Good Shepherd does not drive His sheep—He leads them. Every under-shepherd should do the same. From the human standpoint, it would be much easier to have centralized human authority in the church, so that orders could be issued from headquarters, and obedience would be mandatory. But that is not God's way. The elders oversee the church by being examples to the flock. In a very real way, the elders set the tone in a church. Where there are elders who are godly men, who put the Lord first in their lives, who radiate the grace of the Lord Jesus, one can expect to find a healthy, spiritual church; on the other hand, where the elders are engrossed in the affairs of the world, occupied with outside interests, too busy to read the Word or to pray, one can expect to find a coldness and deadness among the flock.

Again, the elders are told to support the weak. "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The context implies that they should be ready to help those who are in need by giving to them. That is an interesting thing. Instead of making a living off the flock, they should share their living with the flock.

Finally, the elders should reprove, rebuke and exhort (2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:15). Whatever is contrary to the faith must be rebuked with all authority. Those who will not endure sound doctrine should be reprovved and exhorted. The elder must earnestly contend for the faith.

What attitude should the church take toward elders? It is clear from 1 Timothy 5:17-18 that some elders are cared for in a financial way by the church. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward." It is equally clear that others worked for their own support. Paul himself is an outstanding instance of this (1 Corinthians 4:12). In addition, an elder is not to be rebuked, but entreated as a father (1 Timothy 5:1). Christians should not receive an accusation against an elder except before two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). And then, the bishops should be remembered,

recognized and obeyed. “Esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thessalonians 5:13). “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:7-8). Finally, we note the rewards of the bishops. “When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4).

01.13. Those Who Serve

Those Who Serve THE DEACONS In our study of bishops, we learned that their function is the spiritual care and oversight of the house of God. We noted that bishops are also called elders, and that there are several bishops in one church, rather than one bishop over several churches.

We come next to the study of deacons, who they are and what their functions are.

1. What Are Deacons? The word “deacon” simply means a servant - a man who pursues some ministry or service. Frequently in the New Testament it is used in this very general sense. For instance, a duly appointed civil official who rules in public affairs is called a deacon of God (Romans 13:4). Phebe is spoken of as a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Christ Himself is described as a deacon of the circumcision for the truth of God (Romans 15:8). The name has come to be applied to the seven men who were chosen in Acts 6:1-7, to take care of the disbursing of funds. The English word “deacon” is not found in that passage, and the word cannot be restricted to duties attending the administration of funds. It applies to any form of service, as is implied in the word “serve” (diakonein) in verse 2.

2. Their Qualifications

Although the exact duties of deacons are nowhere specified, yet their qualifications are given with great explicitness in 1 Timothy 3:1-16. Beginning with verse 8, we read: “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The first requirement is gravity. A man who is lightheaded and frivolous will not be likely to gain the confidence of those whom he serves. Then the deacon must not be double-tongued. That is, he must be consistent. He must not give one account to certain individuals and a different version to others. Honesty and straightforwardness are mandatory. Especially if his service involves handling funds, he should use such methods as will avoid the slightest possibility of suspicion or distrust. He must not be given to much wine. No one can place confidence in an intemperate person. Experience teaches that intemperance and excess are the enemies of accuracy and dependability. They ruin a man’s testimony for God and unfit him for divine service. Also, he must not be greedy of filthy lucre. (Many of these requirements are identical with those of a bishop.) An avaricious spirit is a snare.

If a man’s heart is set on accumulating wealth, he can become so obsessed with this passion that every other activity in his life is made subservient to it. The Kingdom of God and His righteousness no longer hold first place in his life, and work for God is shoddy and unacceptable. The deacon must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. This is important. It is not enough for him to know the truth. He must practice the truth with a conscience void of offense toward God.

Hymenaeus and Alexander both knew the Word of God, but they trifled with sin - that is, with evil doctrine (2 Timothy 2:17). They drowned out the voice of conscience and made shipwreck of the faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20). There is no substitute for a tender conscience, one which is prompt to discern that which is displeasing to God, and to take sides with the Lord against it. Next we read, "Let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." This is a divine principle of considerable importance. "Let these also first be proved." In another passage, we read, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Timothy 5:22). It is a needed admonition for all of us. We are all prone to be impressed with a person the first time we meet him. We immediately want to advance him to a position of responsibility. Then after a time, we realize that it was a rash act. "All that glitters is not gold." We judged him on too short a notice. The next qualification of deacons seems rather to deal with their wives. It reads, in the King James Version, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." However, we feel that J. N. Darby's translation is more to the point. It reads, "The women in like manner grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." The point is that the women referred to are not the wives of deacons, but rather those who are themselves deaconesses. Phebe was a deaconess (servant) (Romans 16:1). It would be difficult to understand why there should be special requirements for wives of deacons, when no such requirements are found for wives of bishops. However, there is no difficulty if it be understood that the verse applies to women who are serving the local church. As in the case of elders, we learn that a deacon must be the husband of one wife, ruling his own children and his own house well. We have already been reminded that if a man does not command respect and authority in his own home, it is hardly possible that he can do so in the church.

3. Their Rewards

Now the reward of the deacon is twofold. If a man serves well as a deacon, he purchases to himself a good degree. He gains for himself a good standing among his fellow saints and a good prospect of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. Secondly, he purchases to himself great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. True, the world looks upon such a goal as of little value. It is too mystical, intangible, vague. But to the child of God, it is more valuable than gold or precious stones. With regard to the support of deacons, the same thing applies as in the case of bishops. There are some who engage in secular work, and who, therefore, provide for their own needs. Others devote themselves wholly to the work of the Lord and for all such the principle is: "They which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14), "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Galatians 6:6).

4. Conclusion

Now in closing our study on deacons, we should like to refer once again to Php 1:1. There we find three types of people mentioned as being in the church of God - saints, bishops and deacons. It is noteworthy that those are the only classes named. Saints first, then bishops, then deacons. The absence of another class known as the clergy is noteworthy, as has been pointed out by Barnes in his Commentary on the New Testament: "There are not 'three orders' of clergy in the New Testament. The apostle Paul in this chapter (1 Timothy 3:1-16) expressly designates the characteristics of those who should have charge of the church, but mentions only two, 'bishops, and 'deacons' -there is no 'third' order. There is no allusion to anyone who was to be 'superior' to

the 'bishops' and 'deacons.' As the apostle Paul was expressly given instructions in regard to the organization of the church, such an omission is unaccountable if he supposed there was to be an order of 'prelates' in the church. Why is there no allusion to them? Why is there no mention of their qualifications? If Timothy was himself a prelate, was he to have nothing to do in transmitting the office to others? Were there no peculiar qualifications required in such an order of men which it would be proper to mention? Would it not be respectful, at least, in Paul to have made some allusion to such an office, if Timothy himself held it?" The answer is, of course, that if the organization of the New Testament church contained any other order than bishops and deacons, then Paul would have mentioned it. The vast ecclesiastical systems of our day have been added by men, with no warrant whatever from the Word of God. THE CHURCH'S FINANCES

Throughout the New Testament, it is both stated and implied that the church receives its finances from those who are within. There is no hint of any unsaved persons outside the church contributing to its support. Christian giving is an act of worship and is thus limited to those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Neither is there any hint of a local church being regularly financed, subsidized, or supported by any other church, group of churches, or council. There were special adverse circumstances, such as the Judean famine (Acts 11:29) occasioning practical financial fellowship being shown by some churches to fellow-believers. Every local church should be self-supporting. The major teachings of the New Testament with regard to this important subject of the church's finances may readily be outlined.

1. Who Owns What?

All that a Christian has belongs to God. The believer is to act as a steward, using all he has in the best possible way for his Master's glory. (See Luke 16:1-12.) F. B. Meyer stated the truth as follows: "We are meant to be stewards; not storing up our Lord's money for ourselves, but administering for Him all that we do not need for the maintenance of ourselves and our dear ones, in the position of life in which God has placed us. And our only worldly aim should be to lay out our Lord's money to the very best advantage; so that we may render Him an account with joy, when He comes to reckon with us."

2. When and Where to Give The Christian is instructed to give to the work of the Lord. When is he to give? "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store" (1 Corinthians 16:2). How much is he to give? He is to give "as God has prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16:2) and as Christ gave. He was rich, but became poor that we might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He is our example. We should give out of our want, not out of our abundance (Mark 12:44). In short, the Christian should give liberally. The tithe (one tenth) was the minimum given by an Israelite. He brought tithes and offerings. No Christian should be content to give, under grace, what was the minimum requirement under law.

3. How to Give In what spirit is he to give? He should first give himself to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5), thus acknowledging that all belongs to Him. Giving must be done in love (1 Corinthians 13:3), else it is valueless. It should be done in secret (Matthew 6:1-4) - so secret that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, to use a figure of speech. It should be done cheerfully, not grudgingly (2 Corinthians 9:7). We find that the early Christians sold their possessions and shared their wealth with one another (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:31-37). This was an outward expression of their true spiritual fellowship. Such action is nowhere commanded in the New Testament. In fact,

the instructions of Scripture concerning Christian giving presuppose private ownership of property. The action by the early church was purely voluntary. While it is not to be confused with monasticism or with the “communism” of today, the implication is clear. When believers are controlled by the Holy Spirit, they will be generous in giving to every genuine case of need as He may direct.

4. The Reward

What are the rewards for giving? When we are faithful in the unrighteous mammon (in the use of our money), God will commit true riches (spiritual treasures) to our trust (Luke 16:11). Fruit abounds to the account of the giver (Php 4:17). He will have treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21), because his gifts are “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Php 4:18).

5. The Assembly Treasurer

Those who handle the funds of the church should use business methods that are above reproach. “Provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21). At least two men should be appointed to take charge of the offering. In Acts 6:1-6 we read that seven men were appointed to handle the distribution of funds to widows in the assembly. The Epistles contain no definite instructions as to exactly how many men should handle the money, but it is clear from 1 Corinthians 16:3-4 and 2 Corinthians 8:18-19 that it was customary to entrust this responsibility to more than one. In the former passage, Paul states that he would send those whom the Corinthians approved with the offering to Jerusalem, and, if necessary, he would go, too. Note the plurals - “them” (verse 3); “they” (verse 4). In the latter reference, Paul explains that another brother was chosen to travel with him in distributing the gift from the church.

6. The Giving of the Local Church The New Testament reveals three principal purposes for which the funds of the church are expended. These are for widows in the assembly, for poor saints and for those who devote their time to preaching and teaching the Word. For widows in the assembly (Acts 6:1-6). In order to qualify as a “widow indeed” (1 Timothy 5:3-16), a woman had to meet the following requirements. (1) She had to be desolate; that is, without any relatives who could support her, and utterly cast upon the Lord for her needs (1 Timothy 5:4-5, 1 Timothy 5:16). (2) She had to be at least sixty years old. (3) She had to be known for her good works, her noble motherhood, her hospitality, and her charity (see 1 Timothy 5:10). For the poor saints. God has exhorted us many times in His Word to remember the poor (e.g., Galatians 2:10; Romans 12:13); and the prosperity of His people in the Old Testament is closely linked with their treatment of their needy brethren (Deuteronomy 14:29). Around AD. 45, many of the Christians in Judea were stricken with poverty. This was probably due to severe persecution and widespread famine. The saints in Antioch sent relief to the Judean brethren by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30). The assembly at Corinth was urged to do the same thing (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15). We are likewise responsible to care for those in need. The Lord Jesus said, “Ye have the poor with you always” (Mark 14:7). It is good for an assembly to have poor members whom it can care for with a godly exercise. Barnes points out that a great way to unite Christians and to prevent alienation and jealousy and strife is to have a common object of charity, in which all are interested and to which all may contribute. The assembly is not, however, responsible for those who are poor

because they do not want to work. In such cases the divine decree is that, if any man will not work, neither shall he eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). For those who devote their time to the work of the Lord.

It is a divine principle that those who preach the Gospel or teach the Word are entitled to the support of the saints. "Let him who is receiving instruction in the Word give ungrudgingly a share of his worldly goods to him who instructs him" (Galatians 6:6, Way's Translation). (See also 1 Corinthians 9:4-13; 1 Timothy 5:17-18.) Oftentimes, however, the Apostle Paul labored with his hands, rather than accept fellowship from assemblies (Acts 18:3). His reasons for this were simple. He wanted to serve as an example to the Ephesians, that they, too, might support the weak and know the blessedness of giving (Acts 20:33-35).

He also wished to prevent his critics in Corinth from charging him with mercenary motives (2 Corinthians 11:7-12). In addition he desired to prevent the Thessalonian believers from being burdened with his support (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). The saints there were poor and were being persecuted. The assembly at Philippi was commended for ministering to Paul (Php 4:10-19). Note that Paul did not desire the fellowship because of his need, but because he wanted fruit to abound to their account. Note, also, that although the Apostle never publicized his personal needs, he did not hesitate to make known the needs of other saints (2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15). There is, thus, a difference between information and solicitation. As Dr. Chafer has pointed out—"All will agree that information is required, else no intelligent giving is possible; but the real problem centers around the question of solicitation."

7. Conclusion The reader of the New Testament will notice how delightfully simple is the financing of the Church. There are no burdensome, legalistic rules, neither is there an elaborate, complex financial organization. If the simple precepts of the Scripture were followed, two important results would ensue. The needs of the Church would be liberally supplied without solicitations. The Church would not have to be reproached by the world as a moneymaking institution.

01.14. Taking Our Place - The Ministry of Women

Taking Our Place - The Ministry of Women

Definite instructions are given in the New Testament concerning the position and service of women in the church. We shall now summarize these instructions.

1. The Primary Matter With regard to such matters as salvation or acceptance before God, woman is on an equality with man. "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This does not mean, however, that differences of sex are abolished in the church. When dealing with matters of everyday life, the Scriptures distinguish between male and female. For instance, in Ephesians 5:1-33 we have the admonitions: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands" (Ephesians 5:22); "Husbands, love your wives" (Ephesians 5:25). Therefore, we may say that as far as her standing before God is concerned, woman is treated exactly the same as man; but that as far as her position in the church is concerned, a distinction is made. The distinction, in brief, is that woman should be in subjection to the man (1 Corinthians 11:3).

2. Accentuating the Negative

Specifically, the following injunctions are laid down in the Word in order to define the various ways in which the subjection of the woman is to be manifested. She must remain silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). What is meant by "remaining silent" is further explained. She is not permitted to teach (1 Timothy 2:12). She should not ask questions publicly (1 Corinthians 14:35). She should learn in silence with all subjection (1 Timothy 2:11). She must not usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12). She must not pray or prophesy with her head uncovered (1 Corinthians 11:5). That this does not permit women praying publicly in the church, however, is strongly implied in 1 Timothy 2:8, "I will therefore that men pray every where." Here the word used for "men" means "males" in contrast to "females." The Greek word employed here excludes women.

If these instructions are forced on women in a harsh, legalistic spirit, the result is usually twofold. God is not pleased with an enforced obedience which does not spring from the heart (Psalms 51:17). The women themselves are apt to become bitter and resentful. If, on the other hand, the reasons for such instructions are clearly understood, and there follows the obedience of a loving, submissive heart, then this is of great price in the sight of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:22).

3. Reasons Why

God has graciously condescended to state certain underlying principles in His Word in order to explain why Christian women should be in subjection to the men.

First of all, in the order of creation, man had priority over the woman. "Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13). "The man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man" (1 Corinthians 11:8). The argument here is that the order instituted by God in creation is the order which He intends to be maintained in the church; namely, the head of the woman is the man (1 Corinthians

11:3).

Secondly, the purpose of creation indicates the headship of the man over the woman. “Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11:9). Thirdly, sin entered into the world when Eve usurped authority over her husband, Adam. “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Timothy 2:14). The Lord does not wish His new creation to be marred through this type of insubjection, and so He has instructed the women to be under obedience. In the fourth place, Paul appeals to the consistent testimony of the old Testament Scriptures to show that women should be under obedience (1 Corinthians 14:34). “They are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. While no particular commandment states this clearly, yet it is the tenor of the Old Testament.

4. The Covered Head With regard to the instruction that women should be covered (or veiled) when praying or prophesying, two additional reasons are presented. Angels are looking on. “For this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:10, R.V.). This verse seems to picture the angelic hosts observing God’s order on the earth, and it states that women should wear a covering on their head as a sign or badge of the authority of the man. Thus, the angels see that the transgression of Eve in the first creation is not perpetuated in the new creation. The lesson is taught by nature itself. “Doth not even nature itself teach you ...”, (1 Corinthians 11:14). In the original creation, God gave women a distinctive covering—that of long hair. Paul argues from this that a divine principle is illustrated thereby; namely, that woman should wear a veil or covering over her head when praying or prophesying.

5. Accentuating the Positive The fact that woman is in subjection to the man might seem to indicate to some that she has no place or ministry in God’s economy. However, the Scriptures contradict this by showing that woman’s ministry, though not a public one, is nonetheless real and important. Her position is saved by childbearing (1 Timothy 2:15). This difficult verse might mean that a godly mother, though restrained from ministering publicly, is not thereby relegated to a place of uselessness. Her position is to rear her family in the fear and admonition of the Lord. If she and her husband continue in the faith, she may one day have sons to preach and teach the Word. Thus the expression, “she shall be saved,” might refer, not to the soul’s salvation, or even to being saved from physical death in the act of childbearing, but rather to the salvation of woman’s place and privilege. She will not become a nonentity, but will have this glorious ministry of rearing children to live for God’s glory.

Other examples of women’s ministry are found in the New Testament, such as ministering of their substance (Luke 8:3), showing hospitality (Romans 16:1), and teaching the younger women (Titus 2:4).

6. Some Common Objections

Numerous objections and questions arise in connection with the subject of women’s ministry. Does not Paul’s teaching on this subject, it is argued, represent the views of an unmarried man with a prejudice against women? No! They are teachings of the Holy Spirit of God, or, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:37, “the commandments of the Lord.”

Then it is asked if Paul was merely teaching what was a local custom in his day without any idea that this state of things should be applicable to us today. The answer is that his first epistle to the

Corinthians was written not only to the church of God in Corinth, but to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Therefore the instructions are of universal application. But, we are asked, does not Paul indicate in 1 Corinthians 11:16 that the things that he had been teaching were not binding, and that such customs were not practiced among the churches of God? (“But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”) Such an interpretation undermines the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

What the verse really says is that contention about these commandments of the Lord was not a custom in the churches. The churches accepted them and obeyed them, without arguing or explaining them away. Since woman’s hair is given to her for a covering’ it is argued, is not that the only covering that is required? There are two coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:1-34. A woman’s hair is mentioned as a covering in verse 15, but a veil is necessarily in view in verse 5. Otherwise verse 6 would be saying in effect, “For if a woman does not have her hair on, let her also be shorn, but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her put her hair on.” Obviously such a meaning is impossible. It must mean that a covering, other than her hair, is necessary. Does not the instruction for women to keep silence in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34), merely prohibit their chattering or gossiping while the service is in progress? No! The passage says, “It is not permitted unto them to speak.” The word translated “speak” here never has the meaning of “chatter” or “babble” in the New Testament. The same word is used of God in verse 21, “With men of other tongues ... will I speak.”

Many additional questions arise, such as whether it is all right for women to give a testimony in public, to give an account of their missionary work, to sing a solo. Where individual cases are not specifically dealt with in the Bible, then the general principles of the Word must be allowed to decide. Thus, in any doubtful situation, we should ask: Does this constitute a usurping of authority over the man? Is woman taking a place of leadership? Is she teaching the Word? Since these things are prohibited, we should avoid anything that might constitute an infringement of the spirit of these teachings of the Word.

7. God’s Wisdom is Manifest

God’s design in setting forth these instructions was His people’s good as well as His own glory. Where His Word has been ignored or wilfully violated, strife and disorder have ensued. The positive evil of women usurping authority and teaching publicly is seen in the rise of many cults—notably Seventh Day Adventism, Theosophy, Christian Science—in which women had a prominent role. On the other hand, nothing is more comely and pleasant than to see Christian women occupying their God-appointed place and exhibiting “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:4).

LET US GO FORTH UNTO HIM! In the previous pages, we have discussed the church, both from its universal aspect and its local aspect. we have sought to discover the principles of the church as taught in the New Testament, and to catch the simplicity, zeal, and spirituality of the assembly as it existed in the days of the apostles. Now the question remains, “What is the application of all this to believers in the twentieth century?”

1. The Church Today In order to answer this question, we should first take a brief look at conditions in the professing church today. We find widespread departure, failure, and ruin. We find vast ecclesiastical organizations combining material wealth and political influence but largely devoid of spiritual power. we find denominationalism and sectarianism claiming the loyalty and support of their adherents, yet presenting an unscriptural view of the church. we frequently find the meetings of the church occupied with a lifeless liturgy and a soul-deadening ritualism, offering the people shadows instead of Christ. We find churches with membership rolls including both saved and unsaved, both true believers and those with no vital union with the living Savior. Finally, we find churches that have been corrupted with the leaven of modernism, that have substituted a social gospel for the message of redeeming grace.

2. The Need for Separation

If it be asked what a Christian should do who finds himself in such a situation, there can only be one answer. Separate from it! The Word of God is mercilessly uncompromising in its insistence that believers should withdraw themselves from every form of evil – whether ecclesiastical, doctrinal, or moral. “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” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

It is vain to argue that a Christian should remain within a corrupt church in order to be a voice for God in it. “There is not a single hero or saint, whose name sparkles on the inspired pages, who moved his times from within: all, without exception, have raised the cry, “Let us go forth without the camp;”... The man who goes into the world to level it up will soon find himself levelled down.... The safest and strongest position is outside the camp. Archimedes said he could move the world, if only he had a point of rest given him outside it. Thus, too, can a handful of God’s servants influence their times, if only they resemble Elijah, whose life was spent altogether outside the pale of the court and the world of his time.” “To all who argue for a continuance in a church position which they know to be wrong, Samuel furnishes a pointed and powerful reply—‘To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.’ ”

3. What Next? But the question still remains, “What should a person do after he has obeyed the scriptural injunction to ‘come out’?” In answer to this, we would suggest the following scriptural plan.

Gather together in Christian simplicity with a group of likeminded believers.

Gather to Christ alone; make Him the sole attraction. Though such a policy will not result in large crowds, it will at least provide a nucleus of faithful believers who will not be easily moved by trials or discouragements. As far as a meeting place is concerned, a home is entirely satisfactory, and has a great deal of scriptural precedent (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). Those who require a splendid edifice with religious hardware have never really

discovered the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as the Person to whom His people gather.

Adopt no name or policy that would exclude any true believer from the fellowship.

Adopt no denominational affiliation, and steadfastly refuse any outside control or interference that would infringe on the sovereignty of the local church.

Resist the constant tendency to allow the ministry to drift into the hands of one man. Rather allow the Holy Spirit to use the various gifts which Christ has given to the Church, and provide for the active manifestation of the priesthood of all believers.

Gather together regularly for prayer, study of the Word, breaking of bread, and fellowship. Then engage in an active gospel effort, both individually and collectively. In short, seek to meet as a New Testament church in the truest sense of the word by giving a faithful representation of the body of Christ and by obeying the commandments of the Lord.

4. Those Who Have Come Out

Interestingly enough, this is being done by Christians all over the world today. With no guidebook but the Bible, they have found these principles to be divine, and have followed them in spite of reproach and slander. They own no head but Christ, no fellowship but His Body, no headquarters but His throne. They seek in true humility to witness to the unity of the body of Christ. In their fellowship, they seek to provide a sanctuary for true believers who are oppressed by modernism and related evils. There is no directory on earth that lists these churches, nothing of an earthly nature to bind them together. Their only unity is that which is formed and maintained by the Holy Spirit, and they are content that it should be so.

There is no reason why similar fellowships should not continue to be formed by the Great Head of the Church through the sacrificial and prayerful exercise of His people. Where Christians have caught the vision, and are willing to suffer for it, the Lord will reward their exercise and endeavors, and fulfill their longings for His glory. Is it possible that on the very eve of the Lord's return, we are about to see a great revolt led by the Holy Spirit against apostate Christendom, and a fresh, new movement of His grace, forming small, independent fellowships of Bible-loving Christians? May He who loved the church, and gave Himself for it, bring it to pass, for His own glory!

02.01. Final Destiny

Final Destiny by William MacDonald

Every thinking person must sooner or later wonder where he will go when he dies and where he will spend eternity. Take a few minutes to read this and you will find the answers.

02.02. What is your authority?

What is your authority? In seeking answers to life's most important questions, we must have some authority. The choice narrows down to two possibilities. It is either man's opinion or the Word of God. It's what people suppose or it's what God says. In matters of vital and enduring significance, it must be an infallible authority. There must be no room for error. Human opinion certainly doesn't qualify here. Just as people's faces differ, so do their opinions.

Only the Bible, the Word of God, is infallible. It is truth (John 17:17). But how do we know?

- We know it by its fulfilled prophecies. There are over 60 prophecies concerning Christ alone that came true when He was on earth. In addition, there are hundreds of prophecies concerning Israel and the Gentile nations that have come to pass. The probability of all this happening by chance is too small to consider.

- At least 40 men in different countries, at different times, in three different languages, over a period of 1600 years penned the Sacred Word. They had no way of collaborating, yet the Bible has a unified theme. It tells one consistent story. What other book can boast of such intelligent design?

- The Scriptures are unique in their power to transform the lives of people from sin and shame to decency and integrity.

- The words of the Bible are applicable to all times; they are as current as the hourly news broadcast.

- They have universal appeal; they speak to people of every race, tongue, tribe, and nation.

- They are inexhaustible, providing material for endless study, comfort, and guidance.

- Think of all the literature God's Word has prompted – Bible dictionaries, commentaries, concordances, poetry, and sermons. It has inspired great movements such as the abolition of slavery, civil rights, social justice; institutions such as hospitals, schools, orphanages, homes for the poor and aged; and world agencies to alleviate poverty and hunger. It has exerted a positive influence on human society wherever it has traveled.

- It is pure, exposing sin and warning against it. It does not stoop to popular culture but seeks to elevate it.

- It is a living book. Some people actually fear it, while others would die for it.

- The Bible claims to be inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). That means that the words are God's words. If they are not, then it is a fraud. But even its enemies do not accuse it of being a hoax.

- The Holy Bible has endured centuries of efforts to burn and banish it. Yet it has survived. When governments forbid it, smugglers risk imprisonment and death to defy such edicts.

·No other book can compare with God's Word in the number of languages in which it speaks and the number of people who have read it.

·This amazing book records the life of a perfect Person. A mere man cannot write such an account. The French skeptic, Renan, said that it would take a Christ to invent a Christ. In the literature of the ages, the Bible stands unparalleled and unique. Those who have experienced its transforming power in their lives are not likely to deny that it is the Word of the living God. Or, as someone has said, he who has felt the force of it is not likely to deny the source of it.

There is no risk in accepting the Bible as our final authority.

02.03. What does the Bible say about our destiny?

What does the Bible say about our destiny?

Now let us think about what the Bible says about death and the hereafter.

It says that death is certain. It is appointed to men to die once (Hebrews 9:27). Who can argue with that?

Every cemetery and funeral home bears silent testimony to that fact. Generations come and generations go. "Each one thinks that he will be eternal, and then that one becomes the missing face" (Will Houghton). Death is inescapable. The Bible not only says that people must die. It adds in the verse just quoted but after this the judgment. Note the words after this. Death is not the end. There is a hereafter. After death there is judgment and an eternity of endless suffering for those who are not ready to meet God. The Bible says and whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). The Bible also tells us that there are only two places where a person can spend eternity – heaven or hell. The God who does not lie speaks of only these two destinies for the human race. A man or woman may choose not to believe this, but that does not alter the fact.

Since everyone must die, and since he will spend forever in heaven or hell, the most important thing in life is to know that he will have heaven as his address forever. Is it possible to know, and if so, how?

Yes, it is possible to be positively sure.

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life (1 John 5:13). But first the bad news

Before we get to the how-to of eternal life, we have to talk about sin. What does that word mean and why is it important?

Sin is anything that falls short of the perfection of God (Romans 3:23). It means missing the mark.

It is not only doing wrong; it is failure to do what we know is right (James 4:17). This is known as sin of omission. Sin is lawlessness, the stubborn refusal to do God's will (1 John 3:4). When we have a bad conscience about doing something, yet go ahead and do it anyway, that is sin (Romans 14:23).

Finally, all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17). The Bible is explicit and emphatic in declaring that everyone has sinned.

It says that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). It also says that there is not a just man upon earth who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Let's take a little test to see if you are an exception to the rule. Check the following lists to find out.

We begin with what mankind calls the grosser sins: fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, murder, and idolatry. Multitudes will plead not guilty to any of these (until they remember that Jesus said that the man who looks on a woman with lust has committed adultery (Matthew 5:28) and the one who hates another person is a murderer) (Matthew 5:22).

We move on to drunkenness, drug addiction, abortion, child abuse, cruelty, witchcraft, swearing, and addiction to pornography. Do you still protest your total innocence?

If so, then check the following: coveting, lust, envy, jealousy, hatred, pride, selfishness, gossiping, lying, cheating, disrespect of parents, promise breaking, and unfaithfulness. Can you now raise your right hand and testify under oath that you have never committed any of the above? If so, check one more point. How about an impure thought life? The awful truth is that we are not just one-time sinners but sinners by practice. We sin every day in thought, word, and deed. If you deny this, you deceive yourself (1 John 1:8) and make God a liar (1 John 1:10).

We are all depraved, that is, utterly sinful. We may not have committed every sin, but we are capable of doing it. And sin has affected every part of our being (Romans 3:13-18). What we are is a lot worse than anything we have ever done (Jeremiah 17:9). No sinner can enter heaven (Revelation 21:27) unless his sins have been forgiven. If you have committed one sin, you are a sinner, and as a guilty sinner, you need to be saved. A divine dilemma But there is a problem. God is holy (Leviticus 19:2). He must always do what is right and proper. He cannot tolerate sin (Habakkuk 1:12-13) compromise with it, overlook it, or wink at it. His Word is clear that the soul that sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4). God's law demands the death of the sinner. The debt must be paid. Sin's penalty must be endured.

Yet if we endure the penalty for our sins, we will be doomed and damned eternally. The divine dilemma is this. God loves the sinner (John 3:16). He does not want anyone to perish (Ezekiel 18:32; 2 Peter 3:9). He wants him or her to spend eternity with Him in heaven. He didn't make hell for mankind, but for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). But He cannot allow a person to enter heaven while that person is still in his sins, that is, with sins still unforgiven. Nothing impure, wrong, or evil can ever enter there (Revelation 21:27). How then can God satisfy His love and still be righteous? How can He save sinners and still be holy?

02.04. There's hope for the hopeless

There's hope for the hopeless The situation is not hopeless. God has found a way by which He can forgive our sins without compromising His justice (Romans 3:26).

He sent His beloved Son to the earth 2000 years ago to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). The Lord Jesus Christ went to the Cross of Calvary to die as our Substitute. That's a key word – Substitute. He died in our place (Galatians 2:20). He died the death that we should have died (1 Corinthians 15:3). He paid the debt that we owed because of our sins. He endured the penalty that we should have endured (1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18).

We never understand the Good News until we realize that Someone has died for us, and that Someone is no less than our Creator-God (John 1:1; John 1:3). Instead of the sheep dying for the Shepherd, the Shepherd died for the sheep. Instead of the creature dying for the Creator, the Creator died for His creatures. But how do we know that Christ's work as our Substitute was satisfactory to God the Father? We know it because He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead on the third day (Romans 4:25; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:4). This was positive proof that Christ finished the work necessary for our salvation and that God accepted it. If God hadn't raised Him, His death wouldn't have been different from any other person's. Jesus was the first One to rise from the dead in a glorified body that would never die again. This raises another question. If Christ died for all, then does it not follow logically that all are saved? No, it does not. The work of the Lord on the Cross is sufficient for the salvation of all, but it is only effective for those who accept Him as their Substitute. God is not in the business of taking people to heaven who don't want to be there. He cannot populate heaven with people who are still practicing sinners. What kind of a heaven would it be if it were inhabited by the world's worst perverts, murderers, and gangsters?

How not to be saved

Before we get to God's way by which a person can be sure of heaven, let's think of various false ways on which men and women are depending.

Most people think that salvation is by good works, by doing the best they can, by living a good life, or by good intentions. This is what most religions teach and most people in the world believe. The Bible says that this way seems right to people but it ends in death and doom (Proverbs 14:12). This is not the way to heaven. Salvation is not by meritorious works of any kind. The Bible says that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). It doesn't say all our sins. It's all our good works that are like filthy rags. The Bible also says that it's not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us (Titus 3:5). It insists that salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:9).

It's not by baptism, church membership, putting money in the collection, or religious rituals. If salvation were by works like these, then Christ's death would have been unnecessary. He would have wasted His life if there was some other way (Galatians 2:21). And if good works were the way of salvation, no one could ever know he was saved. He would never know if he had done

enough good works or the right kind.

Mark Twain said that if salvation was by being good, your dog would go in and you would stay out. A surprising number of people believe that they will get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments. Most of them cannot even recite the Ten Commandments, but they know that they are in the Bible and so that must be the way. What they don't know is that no one can keep these Commandments perfectly. God gave them in order to reveal sin (Romans 3:20), not to reveal salvation. They are God's standard to show us how far we fail.

Salvation is not by education, science, philosophy, psychology, materialism, reformation, or an improved environment.

Education teaches a sinner, but he only becomes an educated sinner.

Science can explore outer space but it cannot change a person's inner life.

Philosophy is man's wisdom. At the end of his life, American philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "Philosophy has proved a washout to me."

Psychology cannot explain human behavior, let alone change it.

Materialism may put food in the stomach but it can't save the soul.

Reformation may put new clothes on a person but it doesn't put a new person in the clothes. That is why Jesus said, You must be born again (John 3:7).

02.05. Only one true way to heaven

Only one true way to heaven

God now offers salvation as a free gift to all who will repent of their sins and receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Acts 20:21). Let's think about those two words, repent and believe. They are like two sides of the same coin. We repent when we acknowledge our need of salvation. We believe when we accept God's way.

What does it mean to repent? An old Puritan said that repentance is the vomit of the soul. It means that you are repulsed by your sin because it is disgraceful and disgusting. You do an about face – turning to God and away from your sin (Isaiah 55:7).

What does it mean to believe? You do this by accepting Jesus Christ as your only hope for heaven. You say from your heart, "Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner and unfit for heaven, but I believe You died for me on the Cross of Calvary, bearing the punishment that should have been mine. Now by a definite act of faith, I take You as my Lord and Savior, from now on to live for You." To believe in Christ is to come to Him just as you are, in all your sin. An artist wanted to paint a picture of a prodigal son. One day he saw a beggar on the street and made an appointment for him to appear at the studio the next day. The beggar appeared, neatly dressed and clean shaved. The artist said, "I can't use you now. You should have come as the beggar that you really are." To believe is to open the door to Him (Revelation 3:20). It is to put your whole weight on Him as you do when you sit on a chair.

Faith is like taking a parachute jump. You trust your life to that circular piece of nylon. It is like diving into the swimming pool. You commit yourself to the water without reservation. It is accepting a pardon. A pardon is only a piece of paper. To be effective, it must be accepted. To believe in Christ is the most sane, sensible, rational thing that a person can do. What is more reasonable than believing in your Creator? There is nothing about Him that makes it impossible to believe in Him.

There is no risk in believing in Him. He is altogether trustworthy and His Word is the surest thing in the universe.

We must never forget the following great truths. Salvation is in a Person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:3). If you have Him, you are as saved as God can make you (1 John 5:12).

Christ is the way to heaven (John 14:6). He is the only Way (Acts 4:12). No amount of sin is too great for God's salvation (Hebrews 7:25).

Actually it's your sin that makes you eligible for salvation. Christ didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17).

It's your unworthiness that makes you a prime candidate for eternal life. The only people who go to heaven are sinners who don't deserve it but whom God has forgiven. A key word of the gospel This is a good place to stop and talk about grace, one of the key words of the Christian faith. Grace is the undeserved favor that God shows to those who deserve the very opposite. It is something you cannot earn or merit. It's a free gift. The minute you try to earn or merit it, it becomes a debt. The apostle Paul makes this distinction when he writes: Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Romans 4:4-5). In another place he again distinguishes between grace and works: And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is not more work (Romans 11:6). It's not our merits that make us fit for heaven but the merits of Christ. That's why there are no degrees of fitness for heaven. There is no fitness beyond that which is found in Jesus.

02.06. Why some people don't trust Christ

Why some people don't trust Christ

It seems unreasonable. God wants to give salvation as a free gift to those who will accept His Son by faith, yet people refuse the invitation. Why? There are several reasons.

·In their colossal pride, they are ashamed of Jesus. Christ says to them, whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

·They are afraid of a violent reaction from their family. The Lord Jesus anticipated this when He said, He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37). In other words, Christ must come first.

·They love their sins more than they love Christ. That is an irrational choice that will be regretted forever.

·They love the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43).

·They are not as desperate as they should be. Eternal life is not their top priority.

·They are afraid that the cost is too high, that they would have to give up too much. They should consider the cost of not trusting Christ.

·They are afraid that they wouldn't be able to hold out. In their own strength, they would not be able. But when the Lord begins a work in a person's life, He holds that person in His mighty hands.

·They are too busy. When a Christian visited a businessman, the latter asked what he wanted. "Just to speak to you about your soul and where you will spend eternity."

"But can't you see that I'm busy?" The Christian put out his hand to say goodbye and then said, "Suppose I had been death!"

Excuses, excuses, excuses Well-worn excuses abound whenever the claims of Christ are presented to people.

Here are a few of them and the answers to them.

·"There are so many hypocrites in the church." The Lord doesn't ask you to believe in other people but in Him.

·"All the church wants is your money." Christ doesn't want your money; He wants your trust.

· "What about people who have never heard the Gospel?" The Judge of all the earth will do right (Genesis 18:25). The question now is not about the heathen. It's about you who have heard the Gospel. What are you going to do with it?

·“Why does God allow so much evil in the world?” Through the atoning work of Christ, more glory has come to God and more blessing to man than if sin had never entered.

·“If Christians are right, why are there so few of them?” At the time of the flood, only the eight people who entered the ark were saved. All the rest perished in the water. It is not true that the majority is always right.

·“How can a God of love send people to hell?” People choose to go to hell by willfully refusing the offer of salvation.

·“Isn’t it narrow-minded to think there is only one way?” As mentioned already, if there was more than one way, then the Lord Jesus didn’t need to die. Why would He pay the greatest price if a lesser price would do?

·“It seems too easy.” It has to be easy if salvation is going to be available to all. Everyone can believe on Him, whereas not everyone could meet any other condition.

These are excuses. The problem is not in the mind; it’s in the will. Jesus made this clear when He said, You are not willing to come to me that ye might have life (John 5:40). On another occasion He said to Jerusalem, How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, but you were not willing (Luke 13:34)!

02.07. The moment to decide

The moment to decide Christ invites you to repent, believe on Him, be born again, and find rest (Matthew 11:28).

Make no mistake about it, you are either for Christ or against Him (Matthew 12:30). If you are against Him, you take your place with mass murderers, terrorists, rapists, pedophiles, and other sexual deviants. Hardly a desirable circle of companions for eternity, is it?

Why you should trust Christ and be saved Four compelling facts call for a positive response to the call of Christ: Your present happiness depends on it. Your forever welfare depends on it.

You have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

There is no risk.

Why you should do it now The present moment is the only time of which you can be sure. God says that now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Life is uncertain. Every day people rise and go to work, little realizing that before evening they will have met God. Today some will leave Planet Earth due to a heart attack, an accident, or criminal assault. The possibilities of sudden death are legion. The coming of the Lord is near. Jesus may come at any moment. Those who are saved will meet Him in the air and return with Him to the Father's house in heaven (John 14:1-3). Those who are not saved will remain for a fearful time of judgment on the earth (Matthew 24:21) and a lost eternity (Revelation 20:14-15).

You've already kept Him standing outside the door for years. You don't treat others that way. Why do you treat your God like that? Let Him in.

God has made an unchangeable decree that every knee will bow to Jesus and every tongue will confess Him as Lord (Php 2:10-11). It is better to do it now voluntarily and be saved than to do it by compulsion later on and be lost eternally.

It is later than it has ever been before. A little boy counted off the chimes on the grandfather's clock when it struck on the hour in his grandmother's house. One day it was out of order and it chimed 13, 14, 15 times. The boy ran in to the kitchen and said, "Grandma, Grandma, it's later than it's ever been before." The day of opportunity is almost over.

Someday you will stand before God and the question will be "What did you do with my Son?" Your final destiny will depend on the answer. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).

02.08. How can I know?

How can I know? When you repent of your sins and trust the Lord Jesus as your Savior from sin it is important that you be well grounded in the assurance of salvation. How can you have utmost confidence that you are now saved? The first way is through the Word of God. The Bible says that 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 (Romans 10:9). As soon as you have believed in Jesus as your undoubted Lord and Savior, God says that you are saved. He cannot lie, deceive, or be deceived. If He says it, it is true.

Other evidences of salvation appear in the days that follow. You will have a new hatred of sin (Romans 7:24) and a new love of holiness (Romans 7:22) Although you will still commit acts of sin, you will not practice it (1 John 3:9). Sin will not have dominion over you (Romans 6:14) You will love the children of God (1 John 3:14) You will continue in the faith (1 John 2:19).

Some people have a dramatic conversion. They are filled with joy as they are released from the burden of their sins. With others it may be simply the quiet acceptance of God's gift without any outward signs or fanfare. In either case, a person should not base his assurance of salvation on feelings. They are too changeable and undependable. If Christ alone is your hope of heaven, you are saved whether you feel it or not. Facts are better than feelings.

02.09. What's next?

What's next?

Baptism. Now that you are saved, you will want to obey the Lord in baptism. While it is not necessary for salvation, it is necessary for obedience (Matthew 28:19). In baptism, you publicly pledge your allegiance to Christ as your Lord and Savior. You identify yourself with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). Because He died as your Representative, you died with Him. Baptism is also a commitment to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). This means to live the baptized life as one who has died to sin.

There are other important steps in the Christian life.

Confession. You should learn to confess your sins directly to God as soon as you are conscious of them. When you do, you receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9). You received forgiveness from God the Judge for the penalty of sin when you trusted Christ. Now you receive parental forgiveness from God your Father.

Consecration. Begin each day by presenting your body a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1-2). This means that you exchange your will for His. The Bible. To grow in the Christian life you must read, study, memorize, and meditate on the Bible. This is how you hear God speaking to you.

Prayer. In prayer you speak to your heavenly Father. It is good to pray at regular times and also whenever some special occasion arises.

Local church. As soon as possible you should associate with a Bible-believing church, one that accepts the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. A New Testament church is one that is composed of saints, elders, and deacons (Php 1:1) and that meets for the apostles' doctrine (Bible teaching), fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). Ask the Lord to lead you to the church of His choice.

Witness. Ask Him for opportunities to witness for Him. This means sharing the Gospel with unsaved relatives, neighbors, friends, and other acquaintances.

02.10. A final word

A final word

If you have read this far and are still unsaved, we make a final loving appeal to you. Come to Christ just as you are, believe that He died for you on the Cross, and accept Him as your Lord and Savior and your only right to enter heaven. Then claim His promise: That If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

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03.01. Leadership Kit

Leadership Kit by William MacDonald

03.02. Table of Contents

Table of Contents Assembly Planting Qualifications of Elders Duties of an Elder Recognition of Elders

Church Growth One-on-One Discipleship Leadership Training Church Growth through Hospitality Fundamentals and Secondary Issues Sample Statement of Doctrine A Sample Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage Women's Role In the Church Meetings of the Assembly Women's Silence Ministries for Women

Summary The Prayer Meeting Privileges of Fellowship Responsibilities of Fellowship Decently and in Order Parachurch Organizations

03.03. Assembly Planting

Assembly Planting In the courtyard of a hotel in Honolulu, I saw my first Banyan tree. As the branches of this tree grow out, they send down shoots that reach to the ground, take root, and form secondary trunks. I have always felt that this tree is a parable of ideal church growth. It pictures the way assemblies should multiply. As a local fellowship grows, it should send forth human "shoots" to take root in adjoining areas and form new assemblies. This is the ideal, but unfortunately we don't live in an ideal world. While leaders generally pay lip service to church planting, they display a natural resistance to it whenever it becomes a live possibility. They parade their sixty theological reasons why, in their particular case, it is not a desirable option, or why the time is not yet ripe. They do not want to see the status quo disturbed when everything is going along so smoothly. They need all the help they can get. There is not sufficient qualified leadership for a new work. A hive-off would make it harder for the home church to meet its financial obligations. The children and young people in a new work would not have the same opportunities for fellowship with their own age groups as they would in a larger work. The leaders agree that they will encourage a new work some day -- but not yet.

Other evangelical churches are not deterred by these considerations, and they experience steady growth. Certainly the cults refuse to be held back by this conventional wisdom, and they charge ahead like gangbusters.

If we are to escape the indictment, "faithfulness without fruitfulness" or "truth without growth," we must not listen to our hesitations, but must abandon our natural reluctance and determine before God to give ourselves to the ministry of assembly planting, whatever the cost may be.

How is a new assembly born? It should start with a heaven-sent vision placed on the heart of one or more believers. There should be a burden that will not go away, a persistent consciousness that God is leading. The Holy Spirit plants the idea and creates an answering desire in the hearts of His people. The vision must be bathed in prayer. In this way we acknowledge our inability to make correct judgments and our absolute dependence on His wisdom. Christ, after all, is the Head of the assembly, and only the Head has the right to decide. As we pray, the vision comes more and more into focus. What was a general burden at first gradually becomes specific as to location, agenda, and leadership.

There must be strong, spiritual leadership. Without it, the work is liable to fall apart at an early stage. It is desirable to have what could be called a church planting team--at least two or three couples. Efforts by one man, working alone, have not had a good track record. The Lord Jesus worked with twelve disciples. Paul traveled with a team of men, planting assemblies. It seems to be a divine pattern.

If the new work is to be a hive-off from an existing assembly or assemblies, it is important to proceed with tact, love, and unity. Very often there is that natural hesitation and reluctance in existing assemblies to see valued members leave. Elders often fear what seems to be a threat to

their numbers. It takes prayerful waiting on the Lord to see Him incline the hearts of the leaders to extend the right hand of fellowship to the new work. The church planting team will want to agree on certain basic issues and to adopt certain ground rules. For example, they will draw up a statement of faith. In addition, they might consider the following ground rules which one team agreed on:

There must be absolute unity on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. No deviation from these basic truths would be tolerated. On secondary matters, the assembly would submit to the consensus of the fellowship. The church planting team would not necessarily constitute the permanent leadership. They would serve for at least one year. At the end of that time, the assembly would meet to ascertain which men the Lord had raised up to be elders. There would then be a public recognition of this leadership and the church planting team would be dissolved. When the assembly would grow in numbers to between 100 and 150, positive steps would then be taken toward the formation of another work. No efforts would be made to grow by transfers from other assemblies or churches. Rather the goal would be to reach unsaved people, see them converted, baptized, disciplined and brought into the fellowship. A decision must be made with regard to location. New residential neighborhoods are ideal, but it is preferable not to locate in the front yard of an already-established evangelical church. At first, the assembly can meet in a home. Then, when it outgrows the home, it can move to rented facilities or it can purchase or build a modest building. Sometimes zoning laws and parking regulations preclude home meetings. The leadership must weigh all the pros and cons. The nature and order of meetings are generally fairly easy to decide. The team will take into account the centrality of worship, the importance of collective prayer, and the spiritual diet needed for the flock.

Just as there is joy when a baby is born, so there is a deep-seated ecstasy in connection with the planting of a new assembly. Believers experience a new warmth of fellowship, an enthusiasm in striving together to see the assembly grow, and a satisfaction in exercising gifts that are stifled in a larger church.

Just as human families rejoice when sons and daughters marry and start families of their own, so assemblies should rejoice when they are privileged to "parent" new works and to see them functioning as autonomous churches.

Assembly planting is the will of God. Blessed are those who work with Him in accomplishing His will!

03.04. Qualifications of Elders

Qualifications of Elders An elder must be:

Blameless (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6-7). He must be above reproach, both at home and away from home. He must not be open to justifiable accusations. It obviously does not mean that he must be sinless, but it may include the thought that when he does offend, he makes things right quickly by apology, confession and restitution.

Husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). Does this mean that a man must be married? No. The emphasis is on one wife, not a wife. Yet it cannot be denied that the experiences of married life equip a man to deal with the family problems of others better than if he were single. Does it mean he must not remarry should his first wife die? Remarriage in such a case is not frowned on in the New Testament (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39 -, 1 Timothy 6:14). Does it mean that a man must not be divorced under any circumstances? The exception clause in Matthew 19:9 allows for divorce when one partner has been guilty of immorality. Does it mean that a man must not be remarried after divorce? If a man is divorced on Scriptural grounds, he is free to remarry. However, even if the man is really an innocent party, he must face the fact that there may be questions from time to time as to this irregularity in his married life. This is something he may have to live with. Does it mean that he must not be a bigamist, a polygamist, or have concubines or lesser wives? Certainly these conditions would bar him from being an elder in a local assembly.

We can be sure that the general thrust of this requirement is that the man must be a faithful husband and have an exemplary married life.

Vigilant (KJV) better rendered "temperate" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). He must be self-controlled, not only in regard to his appetite but in every area of life. He must be restrained, not indulgent; moderate, not extreme; alert, not sleeping.

Sober or sober-minded (1 Timothy 3:1-16; 1 Timothy 2:1-15; Titus 1:8). He must be serious about the issues of life and of eternity, given more to edifying others than to light, frothy conversation. He must not be perpetually cracking jokes, but must be exhorting, teaching, guiding, comforting, warning and encouraging. He must be a sensible, mature man, not a spiritual featherweight. He must be prudent and sound in judgment, not characterized by levity and worldly-wisdom. of good behavior (KJV) or orderly (1 Timothy 3:2). The word "orderly" first requires that he be disciplined in his personal life, in the home, in business and in assembly life. It means that he is not careless or slipshod. He keeps appointments on time and does his work on schedule. He is neat and methodical, working systematically, not helter-skelter. It may also include the idea that he is dignified and respectable.

Given to hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). This means that an elder keeps "open house" for all, both saved and unsaved, and is always ready to provide spiritual and material help. In order for him to be hospitable, his wife must share his goals and be willing to spend herself in this important ministry.

Apt to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). An elder must have a working knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, able to teach, to exhort, and to expose and rebuke false doctrine. He does not have to have the gift of teaching, but must be able to help people from the Word with their problems. As someone has said, "He must be able to communicate the Word to others in a non-threatening and objective manner." To be able to teach others, he must be teachable himself. Not given to wine (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). He is not given to excess in this area but able to control his appetite. But there, is also the thought that he is not a brawler (RV) and not quarrelsome over wine (RV, marg.). This qualification may seem superfluous in a country where many if not most Christians practice total abstinence, but we must remember that the Bible was written for all countries and all cultures. No striker (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). This means exactly what it says -- that an elder does not hit other people. He is not pugnacious or combative. This requirement may forbid emotional as well as physical violence, but it does not forbid discipline of a man's children. Not greedy of filthy lucre, that is, no lover of money (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2). An elder realizes that he is here for bigger business than to make money. For him the spiritual has a higher priority than the material. Money is not an end but a means to an end. He adopts a modest standard of living, so that everything above his needs and those of his family can be used for the Lord. He doesn't serve the Lord for pay, feeling it is better for the ministry to cost him than for it to make him rich.

Patient. or better, gentle (1 Timothy 3:3). An elder is meek and longsuffering. He does not cut down people with words, or treat them harshly. Rather he treats the flock as a good shepherd handles lambs. Not a brawler, that is, not quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3:3). If a man is contentious, argumentative, or quarrelsome, he is disqualified as an elder. A godly overseer doesn't go around with a chip on his shoulder. He is not always carrying on a debate with some fancied opponent. He is not a source of disunity among God's people.

One who rules well his own children (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). This does not mean that an elder must have children, but, once again, he will be better able to handle family problems that arise in the assembly if he has raised children himself. The elder's children must be believers and must be subject to his leadership in the home. This certainly applies to little children living at home, but it may also apply to grown children as well. The word used here for children is used for grown children in 1 Timothy 5:4 and Titus 1:6. It is disquieting how closely the Bible links parental training with the behavior of children (Proverbs 22:6). If a man cannot rule his own family well, it is unlikely that he will be a suitable elder, since the same principles apply in each case (1 Timothy 3:5). Not a novice (1 Timothy 3:6). The peril of pushing new converts into places of spiritual leadership is evident from the tragic results that have followed. Pride and conceit make them easy prey, for the Devil's trap. Just as a baby should crawl before he walks or talks, so should a believer have a normal spiritual growth. A man who has never had a spiritual childhood should never be an elder. There must be that training and seasoning that come from years of Bible study and experience in the things of God. A good testimony from outsiders (1 Timothy 3:7). The elder must have a good reputation among unbelievers. In business and social contacts, his life must match his profession. He is disqualified if the unsaved have to say of him, "What you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say." Or if the Indian has to say, "Heap high talk -- heap low walk." Not self-willed (Titus 1:7). Since an elder is one among equals, he must be able to work cooperatively with others. If he is stubborn and inflexible on nonessentials, if he always has to have his own way, he should

eliminate himself from consideration as an elder. The elder must not be a dictator or a tyrant, lording it over God's heritage. A man who has always been boss in his own business may find it especially difficult to conquer self-will. Also those who have a pathological distaste for unanimous decisions must change if they are to be overseers. Not soon angry (Titus 1:7). An elder must not be quick-tempered, irritable or volatile. To put it in vernacular, he must not fly off the handle easily or have a short fuse. A lover of good (Titus 1:8). This means that he must be a lover of good men, and of good in general. And of course, to love good is to do good.

Just (Titus 1:8). A just man is one who can always be depended on to do what is right. He is honest, fair and impartial. With him there are no shady dealings, no under-the-counter transactions. People can trust him implicitly.

Holy (Titus 1:8). Here the elder must be separated to God from sin and the world. His life must be one of moral purity and spiritual dedication to God. He must live in right relationship to the Lord.

Holding fast the faithful Word (Titus 1:9). This means that he is unalterably committed to the inspiration and authority of the Sacred Scriptures, and that he defends the Word against false teachings.

NOTE: In this list of qualifications, nothing has been said about:

Academic degrees Success In business Scintillating personality Financial wealth

03.05. Duties of an Elder

Duties of an Elder

1. It is taken for granted that an elder must be in faithful attendance at the meetings of the assembly and thus aware of situations among the saints that might need his attention. He must be sensitive to needs and attempt to minister to these needs.
2. Together Leadership Kitwith the other elders, he should set goals and priorities for the assembly.
3. He should teach the Word of Truth.
4. He should carry on a counseling ministry, both with saved and unsaved. This should include pre-marital counseling when he is asked to perform a wedding ceremony.
5. He should be a tireless visitor, contacting the saints on a systematic basis, and also taking the gospel to the unconverted.
6. He should have a disciplined prayer life, interceding regularly for every family in the local fellowship.
7. Together with his wife, he should have an open house, showing hospitality as an integral part of his ministry.
8. He should be constantly seeking to recognize the gifts in the assembly and to provide outlets for the development of these gifts.
9. He must exercise watchfulness concerning those who might be growing cold or who might be in danger of falling into sin. He must also be watchful concerning the doctrine, making sure that the saints get a good, balanced diet, free from error. Repetition of fundamental truths from time to time is desirable. Whenever necessary he must correct, reprove, rebuke, exhort, and exercise other forms of discipline.
10. He should be constantly training younger men for leadership.
11. He should serve as a conciliator when differences arise among the saints.
12. He should lead by the example of a godly life, and be available and approachable at any time of the day or night.

03.06. Recognition of Elders

Recognition of Elders

Both the Bible and experience show the need for strong, spiritual leadership in any assembly. They also require that this leadership must be recognized, because if it is not recognized, how can it be obeyed?

Every ordered society is built on two pillars: authority and subjection to that authority. It is impossible to conceive of a disciplined, harmonious community that does not have these two elements. They must be found in the home, business, government, the military, and also in the church. Where they do not exist, there is anarchy, and no society can continue long under anarchy.

Christ Is the Head of the Church, and He has ordained that elders should serve as His under-shepherds. They do not run the Church. He does! But they should be men of such spiritual excellence that they can discern His will for the assembly at any particular time.

There is no question that in the early church, the elders were a clearly discernible body. When Paul was in Miletus, he summoned the elders of the assembly in Ephesus to come to him (Acts 20:17). There was no indecisiveness, no mock-humility by men protesting that they were not spiritual enough. The elders came (Acts 20:18).

It is true that in those days the apostles appointed elders. Some have reasoned from this that since we do not have apostles today, we cannot have elders. That is a misunderstanding. The reason the apostles ordained elders is that the New Testament was not in existence. The saints did not know the qualifications of elders. But the apostles knew and marked out those who met the qualifications. Today we have those qualifications clearly spelled out in the New Testament, and we can recognize those men who do the work and who fulfill the spiritual requirements. Is it necessary to have a formal recognition of elders in the assembly? It may not be necessary for older, more mature saints, but it is necessary for younger ones and even for unsaved folks who may be attending.

Doubtless there are many methods by which elders can be recognized. In suggesting the following one, we are not claiming that it is the best -- only that it has been used with good results. The first step is to select a mature, spiritual man to handle the process. He may be from within the assembly or from some other assembly. It is important that he himself is not seeking a place of leadership in the church. In other words, he is detached and impartial.

He is asked to minister to the entire assembly on the qualifications and work of elders. If this ministry is spread over a number of weeks, one session each week, it gives the believers plenty of time to prayerfully consider the matter and saves them from hasty judgments. In the first session, he explains the purpose and process. He is going to give in-depth teaching on the qualifications and work of elders. As he does so, the saints should be prayerfully deliberating within themselves

as to whom the Lord has raised up to be elders in the assembly. It is not going to be an election, a popularity contest, or a question of personal preferences. They should individually wait on God for a revelation of His mind in the matter.

After the teaching sessions have concluded, they are to communicate to the teacher their conclusions. They may do this by letter, by phone, or by personal conversation. They are guaranteed that their decisions will be held in strictest confidence. If they wish to write anonymously, they may do so. In teaching the qualifications of elders, it is important to emphasize that they are not unattainable. When rightly understood, they describe a man of sterling Christian character. In tracing the work of an elder, it should be pointed out that a man should not be recognized unless he is already doing the work. When the meetings are over and the Christians have submitted their considered judgment, the teacher collates the results. Usually a definite pattern will emerge. Some man or men will be clearly recognized as elders. In other cases, the result will be less conclusive. The teacher then meets privately with those who have been definitely recognized by the assembly. He may ask them if they wish to be officially recognized. If so, a preliminary announcement can be made to the assembly, announcing the names and allowing a week for any objections. Barring any major misgivings, the names of the elders can be announced.

What about future recognition of elders? The same process can be repeated, or the existing elders may decide when a person meets all the Scriptural requirements. But this procedure is only valid if the decision is one that the assembly would reach according to the foregoing process.

03.07. Church Growth

Church Growth

Any assembly that desires to grow must face this fact: between 80% and 90% of new converts are originally contacted by individual believers within the context of their daily lives, whether at work, at school, or in the neighborhood. This does not belittle other methods of evangelism, but it shows that personal, lifestyle evangelism towers above all others.

We should not be surprised. This was how the faith spread in the early days of the church. The Christians took the risen Savior's words seriously, "...you shall be witnesses to me' (Acts 1:8 b). They "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The world will never be evangelized in any other way.

We must abandon the common misconception that the believer's sole responsibility is to get the unsaved to attend the meetings so that the preacher can present the gospel and then lead them to Christ. Every believer should be doing the work of an evangelist. He should be able to present the way of salvation to his contacts. Then when he senses that the Holy Spirit has thoroughly convicted them of sin, he should be able to lead them to Christ as their only hope for heaven. This does not mean that our evangelism should be unrelated to the local assembly. While our main goal is to see people come to Christ, we also want to see them added to the fellowship. We bring the unsaved to the meetings to confirm the testimony we have already given to them. Or, if we have already pointed them to Christ, we bring them in order to see them disciplined in accordance with the Great Commission. An evangelistic assembly is a praying assembly. The place to start is in prayer. This is where the work is done. The saints must be desperate before God in fervent intercession for lost relatives, friends, and neighbors. No amount of programs and gimmicks will ever take the place of prayer. We are in a spiritual battle, and it must be fought with spiritual weapons. An evangelistic assembly is a holy assembly. Effective witness cannot be divorced from sanctified lives. The fruit that a tree bears is a reflection of the condition of the tree itself. A healthy tree brings forth good fruit. Those who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. An evangelistic assembly is a loving assembly. It has a warm, accepting atmosphere. It reaches out to strangers, to those who hurt, to those who have needs. It is people-oriented. It manifests its love by being hospitable. It is outgoing, not ingrown. It cares. An evangelistic assembly is a united assembly. The saints are united in an enthusiasm to see souls saved. They are united in a common, prayerful expectancy. And they are united in a shared joy when people are converted.

We mentioned that the most effective way of making new contacts is through the daily witness of the believers. But there are other methods that should be mentioned. For instance, there is door-to-door visitation. This certainly makes the presence of the assembly known in any community. There are home Bible studies, which have been greatly used in laying a doctrinal foundation for those who later trust the Lord. There is campus evangelism, a good way to reach young people for the Lord and for the assembly. There is the ministry of literature; its possibilities are tremendous. There are special evangelistic crusades with an anointed gospel preacher. These

have been wonderfully used in some places, and sadly ineffective in others. An assembly can advertise its meetings in the local paper. God has used this method to lead isolated individuals to the meetings. Then, of course, there are special programs, films, and musical events. To break down the natural resistance toward attending an assembly for the first time, some fellowships have used less formal methods successfully: picnics, baseball or volleyball games, and hospitality in homes. By attending these, people get to know the local Christians and can more easily be induced to attend the meetings. In order for believers to be enthusiastic about bringing their contacts to the meetings of the assembly, they must be assured that the ministry will be of a high spiritual quality. This fact should cause the elders to be much before the Lord concerning those whom they schedule to minister the Word. Christians will not bring their friends to hear a stumbling, rambling sermon. They want to be sure that there will be a bona fide presentation of the gospel and that there will be solid teaching for those who are already believers. Does this mean that the speakers must be seminary-trained men or those with advanced educational credentials? Not at all! Mere scholarship without deep spirituality can be a boring, deadening thing. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. A scholarly message might reach the head without ever getting down to the heart. What is needed is ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit, ministry with unction, ministry that produces conviction, contrition, conversion, and consecration. God very often uses homespun and untrained men for this work, so that the glory will be His, not man's.

There are few things as good for an assembly as to see souls saved on a regular basis. This produces ecstasy like that of a maternity ward. And it can be the experience of any assembly that is willing to devote itself to New Testament evangelism. But we must have a holy horror of going year after year without seeing any conversions. And we must be willing to use new methods where the old ones are proving singularly ineffective. We get what we go after in life. Let us go after souls.

03.08. One-on-One Discipleship

One-on-One Discipleship In the previous chapter, we talked about church growth through Spirit-led evangelism. Now the question is, "What are we going to do with the new converts? What is the best way to assure their growth to spiritual maturity?" A common approach is to encourage the new believer to faithfully attend all the meetings of the assembly and receive his instruction in this way. But this method has drawbacks. It is extremely slow; it usually has to extend over many years. It is incomplete; there is no guarantee that all important subjects will be covered. It does not teach the convert how to engage in practical Christian work; it is all academic. Jesus not only taught doctrine; He took the disciples out and showed them how to do the work. As soon as someone is saved, a spiritually mature believer should undertake the responsibility of discipline him. If the convert is a woman or girl, then an older sister should become the teacher (Titus 2:3-5).

Rather than following the same stereotyped program for each person, the one doing the discipline should look to the Holy Spirit for individual guidance. Then he must ask himself. "What are the subjects that we should cover so that this convert will be a well-grounded and well-rounded believer?" The following might be a representative list: assurance of salvation; eternal security; baptism; worship and the Lord's Supper; daily quiet time; personal holiness; Bible study; prayer; guidance; Scripture memory; stewardship of time, talents, and money; personal evangelism. And all this should be supplemented by the consecutive, systematic study of the Scriptures themselves.

It is important to have a regular weekly appointment with the convert, lasting no less than an hour. Here the teacher not only covers the truth of believer's baptism but encourages the disciple to take this step of obedience. Here the teacher explains about the Breaking of Bread service and urges compliance with the Savior's request, "This do in remembrance of me." He teaches the baby Christian how to pray by praying with him. He shows him how to study the Bible, using available helps (concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, etc.). He guides him in the selection of books for his library. He answers questions that may arise. He gives help on personal problems. He commends every evidence of progress, and counsels concerning areas of Christian character that need attention. When the teacher goes out witnessing, he takes the disciple with him. When he visits the sick, he takes the disciple with him. He opens his home, giving practical training in Christian marriage, the Christian home, and proper child training. As much as possible, he shares his life with the one he is seeking to train.

On-fire assemblies today know that it is important to give each new believer individual attention in addition to the training he receives in the meetings. It is costly, but it is effective. It is the method which the Lord used, and therefore it must be the best.

03.09. Leadership Training

Leadership Training

(The author of this article is concerned with personal discipline that is geared to raising up leaders in the local assembly. Elders should always make provision for men to share their ministry and eventually to be their successors.) As important as gospel preaching is in the mission of the church, if we incline our vision no higher than seeing souls saved, of having as our ultimate goal the conversion of unbelievers to become faithful meeting-attenders, then we are guilty of short-sightedness and will eventually be faced with the prospect of a spiritually weak and impotent assembly.

We must set our sights on nothing less than the transformation of immature believers into leaders of the church if we are to share the vision of the One who declared, "I will build my church." In fact, the key factor that insures the continuance of His living edifice is the raising up of spiritual leaders from generation to generation, a strategy that the Master Himself was busily engaged in when He uttered the preceding statement. But if we are to share the vision of the Lord Jesus for church leadership, then we must also adopt His method if we hope to succeed. And His method was personal discipleship - the choice of certain men to be with Him. If the Savior Himself trained His men through three years of constant, personal attention, how can we expect to see effective leaders raised up by relying solely on Bible classes and pulpit ministry? An illustration of the Lord's method is seen in His work with Peter. Study the occurrences of statements and questions, which He directed to Peter, and you will begin to catch glimpses into the personal relationship between Peter and his Lord. And you will see the Savior at work in the life of His disciple - confronting, challenging, encouraging, transforming a rough, untaught fisherman into a faithful shepherd of the flock of God. We can assume that the Savior's method was no different with the eleven other disciples. When the training was complete, He had raised up men who, when filled with the Holy Spirit, actually turned the world upside down. Of course, we can think of objections to following this strategy in our own lives. It seems to us that greater numbers in the training relationship would produce greater dividends in the end. So we prefer to teach large classes and preach to hundreds, hoping to affect more lives at one time. But the result too often is hundreds of shallow Christians. You cannot disciple crowds. Yet when considering the option of spending our time with one or two key men on a regular basis, we think within ourselves, "Why this waste?" and prefer to scatter our efforts across the masses. But this was not the Lord's approach to leaving a legacy of strong leaders.

Another difficulty to overcome in adopting our Lord's approach is the cost of transparency. We run the risk of being known by our disciple in a way that would never be true in a class or from a pulpit. The Lord did not shrink from that intimacy but allowed Himself to be seen, heard, and handled by twelve men every day for three years. When the time had ended, all except one had acquired the same selfless love for others that they had seen and experienced in Him. This is not to imply that specially gifted and charismatic men cannot have a strong influence on the lives of others solely

through ministry to the multitudes. But such men represent a small percentage of the body of Christ, and to expect this method to be the chief source of church leadership is both unrealistic and unscriptural. The result of this method will be a church that flourishes during the active ministry of one man and then dies away with his passing -- for want of faithful men to carry on in his place. Contrast this situation with the Lord's parting words to Peter (John 21:15) and those of Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2).

Man-to-man discipleship does not require specially gifted or charismatic leaders to be effective. Its success depends on a Spirit-filled man who loves God, His Word and His people, and is willing to open his life to another. Given this as the strategy, the tactics are simple.

Meet together often for Bible study and prayer.

Teach by example. Let the disciple see your godly life and your burden for people up close. Jesus did.

Teach through practical experience. Take your disciple with you when visiting the saints and witnessing to the unsaved, and afterwards explain what you did and why you did it. Jesus did.

Work on character. Think of the Lord constantly reminding Peter of his impulsiveness and self-confidence. What is it about your disciple that prevents the adjectives "holy and blameless" from being applied practically?

Exhort and encourage him in the Word, and pray for him. Jesus did.

If anyone had a vision for the growth of the church, It was the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for it. If we are to share that vision with Him in its fullest sense, that is, beyond seeing souls saved to the raising up of leaders of the flock who will be able to teach others also, then we must adopt His methods as our own. If the Son of God Himself found it necessary to concentrate on a few faithful men, how much more should we.

Rick Belles

03.10. Church Growth through Hospitality

Church Growth through Hospitality

Every believer should be interested in church growth, whether the church at large or his own local assembly. The Great Commission calls for the expansion of the body of Christ on earth.

There are many different methods that can be used in achieving this goal. No one method is the best. The Holy Spirit is sovereign and works according to His own good pleasure. Sometimes He is pleased to use a combination of approaches rather than any one.

Some methods are more difficult than others. Door-to-door canvassing, for instance, can be very difficult. This is partly due to the fact that the cults have antagonized the public and made it hard for evangelicals. Also, in some urban areas people are afraid to open their doors for strangers. And some methods are less effective than others. Door-to-door work again! Believers have faithfully covered the area around their chapel several times with little or nothing to show for it. Which brings me to my main point! Hospitality is a method that is highly successful, yet often overlooked. We work hard to get people inside the doors, yet treat them with cool neglect instead of capitalizing on our gains.

Let me run two scenarios past you!

Tom and Fran moved into the neighborhood recently. Sunday morning comes and they decide to look for a good church. So 10:45 a.m. finds them walking into the chapel, a bit intimidated. People are busy visiting in clutches. One man intercepts them, shakes hands and comments on the fine weather. They dodge between knots of people to find their way to seats -- toward the rear of the chapel. The service proceeds on schedule -- good singing, good message. Twelve o'clock. The closing prayer. The people rise to leave. Here and there some saints lean toward each other and whisper, "Who are those strangers?" -- almost as if they were intruders. Others visit with their friends animatedly, catching up on the news of the week. Tom and Fran are almost at the door when an elder greets them, "Glad to have you with us today. Hope you'll come back." They leave and go to the local McDonald's for a hamburger.

Scenario #2. Euphoric over the birth of their first child, Ron and Ruth decide they should start going to church. They don't want their son to grow up as a heathen. They approach the door of the chapel apprehensively. An usher greets them warmly, explains about the nursery, and tells them that they will be invited out for dinner. They don't know it but there is a standing rule in the assembly that all strangers will be invited out. Sure enough before the service even starts a pleasant couple introduces themselves and invites the newcomers home for a meal. Ron and Ruth are relaxed and feel a warmth about this church. This has never happened to them before. At dinner the host gives thanks for the food. The conversation is low-key -- just a time to get acquainted. It turns out that both Ron and Ruth are from Christian backgrounds, but neither is a believer. The visit is profitable as an ice-breaker. The newcomers feel that they have found some caring people.

Question! Which couple is more likely to return?

Answer. Tom and Fran never came back. Ron and Ruth are saved now and in happy fellowship. The results speak for themselves.

Why are we so hesitant to entertain strangers when it has proved so rewarding in the past? Fear is probably one of the main reasons -- fear of the unknown, fear of a new situation, fear of new people, fear of not knowing what to do or how to do it. And of course there is the fear of not knowing what to talk about, of not being "spiritual" enough, of not being able to witness effectively. A second reason is that we have other plans for Sunday afternoon, and taking strangers home would interfere with those arrangements.

Then we think of the added work involved, getting the house immaculate, preparing a meal, then cleaning up afterward. And trying to entertain people at the same time.

Hospitality can be expensive, depending on the menu, and this may discourage those who have to operate on a limited budget. A final reason for not showing hospitality. A chosen few in the assembly get saddled with the responsibility all the time. They are the only ones who do it and it gets old hat after a while. In answer to the first objection, there is no real need to fear. We should just determine to be ourselves, to let people see us as we are. It is not necessary to force the gospel on them. The mere giving of thanks, a testimony shared, or verses read after the meal are enough.

It is true that if we are to be hospitable, it may interfere with our Sunday plans. We have to determine in advance that this is going to be one of our priority ministries.

Hospitality does involve work and inconvenience, but we should not offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing. And we should remember that what is done in His Name is reckoned as being done for Himself. Imagine having Jesus home for Sunday dinner!

Hospitality need not be expensive. We don't have to cook up a fancy meal. A simple fare in pleasant company is all that matters. But the ministry of hospitality should not be left to one or two in the assembly. If enough families take up the ministry, many strangers can be accommodated without burdening anyone.

Here are some practical pointers as to how some assemblies have grown through hospitality. In one, the elders and their wives consistently Invite visitors to their home. If there aren't enough visitors, then they Invite some of the saints to whom they can minister In one way or another. Needless to say, the example of the elders speaks to the other believers.

Another assembly has an Angels' Committee. Each Sunday two couples are assigned to bring a casserole, salad, rolls and dessert. Ushers direct visitors to them for a meal in the chapel dining area after the morning service. The saints thus entertain angels unawares, giving rise to the name of their committee. Once again, if there aren't enough visitors, the hosts are free to invite guests from the chapel.

Many assemblies have a hostess who assigns visitors to particular Sundays. The emphasis is on reaching out to those who are in the service for the first time.

Most fellowships are careful to see that the visiting speaker is invited to someone's home for a meal. What they don't realize is that often the preacher would prefer to relinquish this privilege if he could know that strangers were being taken care of.

If a family holds back for fear of not being able to carry on a profitable conversation, let them consider inviting the speaker along with strangers to handle this part of the ministry.

If Christians are afraid to invite strangers, they should know that very often visitors are equally afraid of entering a new situation. And visitors frequently cannot accept because they already have other plans. But the fact that they have been invited gives them a sense of warmth and acceptance.

Scores of people in assemblies today will testify that they were drawn, not by New Testament church order, or by the preaching, or by the teaching, but by the kind hospitality that was shown to them on their first visit. Is it possible that in our frenetic attempts to promote church growth, we are overlooking one of the most obvious and successful methods?

03.11. Fundamentals and Secondary Issues

Fundamentals and Secondary Issues

There are certain doctrines of the Christian faith which are absolutely fundamental. They are of first importance. As far as they are concerned, there can be no difference of opinion. Believers must be united on these great truths.

What Are the Fundamentals? When we speak of the fundamentals, we are referring to the following: The Inspiration of the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God. The trinity. There Is one God, existing eternally In three Persons. The deity of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is God. The Incarnation. Jesus is also perfect Man. His substitutionary death on Calvary, His burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. The gospel. Salvation by grace, through faith. and apart from works. The second advent. Christ is coming again. Though not all agree on the details of His return, the fact itself is a basic tenet of the faith. The eternal punishment of the lost.

Now these doctrines are not negotiable—We are to earnestly contend for them. They are clearly taught in the Scriptures. They have been held by the evangelical, orthodox church down through the centuries. Conflicting views have been labeled heresies. Believers have been willing to die for these precious truths. We cannot have fellowship with those who deny the fundamentals.

Important Even though Not Fundamental Richard Baxter's well-known formula is an oversimplification. He said: In fundamentals, unity. In secondary matters, liberty. In all things, charity (or love). This might create the impression that anything that is not fundamental is nonessential or unimportant. However, there is another classification that fits between these two -- subjects that are not fundamental but are nonetheless important. Jesus implied such a distinction when He said to the Pharisees, "...ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23). In other words, some parts of the law are "weightier" than others. But Jesus also reminded them that even the less weighty matters of the law require obedience: "...these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone."

So, In the New Testament, there are matters which are not fundamental but which require obedience. These are matters on which the Bible speaks. Some of them are described as commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37). We must not call them nonessentials or treat them as such.

These subjects Include baptism; divorce and remarriage; the outline of prophecy; women's head covering; women's public ministry in the church; the gifts of the Spirit; and the topics covered by the five points of Calvinism. The problem is that Christians hold differing views on these matters. While there is only one right interpretation, believers do not agree as to what that interpretation is. Great and godly men do not see eye to eye. Let us look at some of these issues on which the Bible gives instruction and which are important, even though they have never been regarded as fundamentals of the faith.

Baptism For those who practice believer's baptism by immersion, it is easy to forget that many Christians hold very different views on the meaning and mode of baptism. Paul said, "There is...one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-5) but the many differences in Christendom today seem to deny it. The subject is important and every assembly should adopt a position that is consistent with all that the Bible teaches.

Divorce and Remarriage

Some say, "No divorce -- PERIOD!" Some say, "Divorce, but no remarriage." Others say, "Divorce for unfaithfulness but no remarriage." Still others say, "Divorce for unfaithfulness with freedom for the innocent party to remarry." Some say, "Divorce for desertion." There is no end to the different views. And it is doubtful that there will ever be unanimity.

Sooner or later, every local assembly must adopt a position on the subject in the fear of God, and adhere to that position. Individuals may hold other interpretations, but they must not press their views publicly or privately so as to cause division.

It should be added that even after an assembly adopts a position, the elders will still have to consider each case individually. Such complex situations arise today in the marriage relationship that no stated policy will cover every case. The Outline of Prophecy

Some believers are premillennial, others postmillennial, and still other amillennial. Even among premillennialists, there are three major views: the pretribulation rapture, mid-tribulation rapture, and post-tribulation rapture. There are problems connected with every position. A person can hold any of these views and still be a good Christian.

It is proper that everyone knows what he believes and rejoices in it. But it is also proper that we remember there are godly, sincere believers who hold other views. These honest differences should not prevent us from breaking bread together. On the other hand, those who hold alternate views should respect the prophetic stance of an assembly, and not push their views, thereby causing dissension. When someone insists that everyone must agree with his minority view, there is bound to be trouble.

Women's Head Covering On the one side are those who hold that Paul's instructions were just for the culture in which he lived. Others insist that they are the commandments of the Lord, that Paul bases them on the order and purpose of creation, and that they are "because of the angels," therefore, for all time. Questions arise whether the head covering is just for meetings of the church (and, if so, what is a meeting of the church?), what constitutes a proper covering, etc.?

If the elders of an assembly do not adopt a policy on the subject, there is bound to be confusion. They owe it to the saints to state clearly what they believe the Scriptures teach.

Women's Ministry When may a woman sing or speak in a meeting of the church? The answers given today are too numerous to list. With a sincere desire to obey the Scriptures as closely as possible, elders should adopt a clear, united position. These prayerful conclusions become the policy of the assembly. The Sign Gifts

Another issue that holds the potential for trouble is the charismatic question. Tongues, healing, and prophecy seem to be the gifts around which most controversy has swirled. The differing

viewpoints, even among charismatics themselves, are legion.

We can and must love Christians who disagree with us, but we must not allow the issue to cause division. Therefore, an assembly must decide what the Bible really teaches on this score. The elders have both a right and a responsibility to deal firmly with any who insist on teaching views that conflict and threaten the peace of the assembly.

Five-Point Calvinism A five-point Calvinist believes in man's total depravity; God's unconditional election; limited atonement (i.e., only for the elect); irresistible grace; and the perseverance of the saints.' There are those who disagree. On the third point, for example, they insist that Christ's atonement was for all in its sufficiency and availability. Others insist that extreme Calvinism rules out man's free will.

Spiritually minded, soul-winning Christians are found on both sides of the issue. The fireworks begin when someone insists on pushing his own view where it is not welcome, or when he harps on one subject as if it were the only doctrine in the Bible. When silenced, he often leaves the assembly and influences others to leave with him. The path of wisdom is to enjoy privately one's convictions on the subject but not to force them as if they represented the whole truth. On all these subjects which are important though not fundamental, an assembly, under its leaders, should adopt a clearly stated position. This should be done after careful study and research, after much prayer and with a sincere desire to adhere as closely as possible to the Scriptures. If an assembly adopts a position that is not Scriptural, it is conceivable that some believers will want to withdraw. If so, they should do so graciously, and without seeking to draw others away with them.

Non-essential Issues In addition to the first class of subjects (fundamentals) and the second class (important because taught in Scripture) there is a third class that can be clearly labeled as nonessential. When it comes to these matters, there will always be differing viewpoints, and there must be liberty to disagree without causing strife or division. Here the second line of Baxter's formula applies: In secondary matters, liberty.

Among the non-essential issues are some on which the New Testament does not legislate specifically but which some people feel embody important principles: wine vs. grape juice at the Lord's Supper; one cup vs. individual cups; and the use of musical instruments.

There are other matters that are largely a matter of usage or tradition, such as the use of "Thou" and "Thee" in addressing God. At least one question must be decided on its own merits, that is, the whole dispute as to the "best" Bible version.

Finally, there are matters of moral indifference. These include foods, drinks, and observance of days. They are nonessentials.

Now let us look at these various non-essential subjects and see how an assembly can handle them without conflict and division.

Wine vs. Grape Juice at the Lord's Supper

Let's face it! There are valid arguments on both sides. There is no question that when the Lord instituted the Supper, He used fermented wine and unleavened bread (grape juice did not come in until Pasteur developed pasteurization). But wine stumbles people who have a problem with

alcohol, and we should never do anything that stumbles others (1 Corinthians 8:13). Also, there are many places in the world where wine is not available. After all, it is not the bread and wine that are important. We must get beyond them to the Lord Himself.

One Cup vs. Individual Cups

Again, there are two sides to the matter. On the one hand, one cup symbolizes the unity of the body of Christ. But as an assembly grows, it is not uncommon to use two, three, or even four cups. If four are valid, why not forty? The argument for individual cups rests largely on the danger of spreading disease through the common cup since wine does not have sufficient alcoholic content to kill germs. In any event, this is not a matter of fundamental importance. Rather it provides an opportunity to show love and consideration to those who disagree with us.

Use of Musical Instruments

Here again there must be liberty for an assembly to adopt its own policy. No major creed has ever considered instrumental accompaniment as a fundamental of the faith. We could paraphrase Paul's words without doing violence to them: "For in Christ Jesus neither does an organ avail anything nor the absence of an organ, but a new creation" (see Galatians 6:15).

Times of Meetings

Clearly the Lord has left the decision to the local assembly or its leaders. Sometimes changes must be made, depending on local circumstances. The best time for reaching the unsaved in one locality may not be the best time in another. Traditional times are not sacred. We must be ready to make changes, when they are indicated.

Thou vs. You

Many older Christians prefer to address God as "Thou" and "Thee" out of a sense of reverence. Younger believers prefer to use "You" out of a sense of intimacy but without any lack of reverence. It is not a Biblical problem. In the original language of the New Testament, there is no distinction between a formal "you" and a familiar one. But when the King James Version was published, people addressed one another as "thou" (singular) and "ye" (plural). Thus, Jesus is quoted in the King James Version as saying to Judas, "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" -- certainly not the language of reverence.

What it boils down to is this: any assembly should be big enough to allow for both usages without creating a threatening atmosphere or driving people away.

Bible Versions

Considerable heat has been generated over this issue as a result of the proliferation of versions in recent years. Some believers sincerely believe that the truth of God is at stake. Others point out that the differences among the reputable versions are minor and do not affect any of the doctrines of the faith. As much as we might love any English version, we cannot insist that it is the only right one, because then none of the foreign language versions would be right.

Individual Christians should be allowed to have their favorite version. When speaking publicly, a person should announce the name of the one from which he is reading if it is not the one in

common use. This is a simple courtesy.

Food, Drinks, and Days

There are matters of moral Indifference. These are actions that are neither right nor wrong in themselves. As mentioned above, they include foods, drinks, and observance of days. It is about these non-essential matters that Paul writes:

"Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5 b). He would not have said this about a fundamental of the faith; but in matters of moral indifference, there is liberty for everyone to be fully convinced in his own mind.

"All things are lawful unto me" (1 Corinthians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 10:23). This can only refer to areas or activities not prohibited by God's Word, areas such as food and drink.

"All things Indeed are pure" (Romans 14:20 b). "Unto the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15). This cannot mean all things absolutely, but all things that are neither right nor wrong in themselves.

"I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Romans 14:14 a). The subject is foods. Under the Old Testament economy, certain foods were unclean. Under grace this distinction between clean and unclean no longer holds (Mark 7:19 NASB).

It should be clear that in these passages Paul is dealing with matters that are non-essential. He allows a difference of opinion among God's people, and yet it is often over these inconsequential matters that serious splits occur. We must learn to distinguish between what is central and what is peripheral.

Conclusion Let us now summarize. Concerning the fundamentals, there must be unanimity in any Christian assembly.

Concerning matters that are Scripturally important, even though not fundamental. each assembly should adopt a position in the fear of God. Any contrary teaching, either public or private, that would create strife or division should not be allowed. If a person disagrees with the assembly position and feels he must leave out of faithfulness to the Lord, he should do so quietly and peaceably. Without seeking to draw others away with him.

Concerning the non-essential matters we have listed, there has to be a certain amount of give and take for the sake of unity and peace (Ephesians 4:1-6). We may have strong convictions in these areas, but we must recognize that there are Christ-like souls who do not agree with us. Because of this, we should avoid excessive dogmatism. Cromwell said, "I beseech you by the tender mercies of Christ to conceive it possible that you may be mistaken." When someone tried to nit-pick with Dr. Ironside on some nonessential matter, he would say, "Well, brother, when we get to heaven, one of us is going to be wrong--and perhaps it will be me." The fire Invariably went out, because Dr. Ironside did not add fuel to it (Proverbs 26:20).

Leaving an assembly over a non-essential matter is never the ideal. There can be fellowship without total agreement on these topics. Where there is love and brokenness, prayer and patience, humility and forbearance, differences can be settled amicably. Believers can disagree

without being disagreeable. In all the topics we have discussed, an assembly should adopt a definite stance or policy. Failure to do so results in confusion. Believers generally want guidelines to follow. When the leadership adopts a position after much waiting on God, there is a sense in which their decision is ratified in heaven (cf. Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18), provided it does not violate any Scriptural precept or principle. The only times when it is better to leave is when a person is convinced that in staying he is being unfaithful to the Lord or unable to remain without disturbing the peace of the assembly. Even then the third line of Baxter's timeless formula applies--in everything, love.

03.12. Sample Statement of Doctrine

Sample Statement of Doctrine This assembly accepts the Bible as its divinely inspired authority in all matters. The following is what we believe the Bible teaches regarding the Christian faith.

Major Doctrines The Bible. Every word in the original writings of the Holy Scriptures is inspired of God, authoritative and without error. The Bible is the only written revelation of God to man and is infallible (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; Proverbs 30:5-6). The Godhead. There is one God, existing eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable (Exodus 34:6-7; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; John 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 1:8-12).

Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He entered the human race miraculously by being born of a virgin. He did not sin and He could not sin. He died as a substitute for all the sins of the human race, was buried, rose bodily from the grave, and ascended to the Father's right hand, where He now ministers as our Great High Priest (Matthew 1:21-23; John 1:1; John 1:14; Acts 1:9; Romans 1:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:14-15; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 13:8; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18). **The Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit convicts and converts the sinner. He regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals all true believers in Christ and empowers them to live a holy life (Matthew 28:19; John 16:8; Romans 8:9-16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:12-14).

Man. Adam was created in the image and likeness of God and was an innocent being. He subsequently sinned, and as head of the human race he passed on a sinful nature to all mankind. All men are sinners by nature but also by practice. Apart from God's salvation man is lost eternally (Genesis 1:27; Genesis 9:6; Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1).

Sin. Sin is any violation of or disobedience to the revealed will of God. It is also a state, the absence of righteousness, or anything that falls short of the perfect glory of God. God has established that the penalty of sin is death (Isaiah 53:6; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 3:23; James 2:10; James 4:17; Revelation 20:11-15).

Salvation. Without the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, there is no remission of sin. Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and entirely apart from law-keeping or good works. It is entered into by all those who hear and understand the gospel, repent of their sins, and trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior (Mark 1:15; John 1:12-13; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Hebrews 9:22). **The Assembly.** The universal Church is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus from Pentecost to the Rapture. Each local assembly or church should be a miniature of the universal Church, expressing the great truths of the latter. The local assembly is made up of believers in the Lord Jesus who have been baptized following their conversion and who meet together for teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, and evangelism. Christ is the head of each assembly and He entrusts leadership to the elders, men who are recognized as Christ's under-shepherds. Each assembly is also to have deacons to serve the practical needs of the assembly (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 1

Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:24-25; Ephesians 5:30; Acts 6:3-6; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Hebrews 13:17).

Ordinances. There are two Christian ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism by immersion signifies that the believer has died with Christ, has been buried with Him, and has risen to walk in newness of life with Him. The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast at which believers worship the Lord and show forth His death until He comes again. In accordance with the early church, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every Lord's day (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 10:47-48; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:26).

Other Important Doctrines

Assurance and Security. All true believers can know that they are saved on the authority of the Word of God. Those who are in Christ are safe and secure for all eternity (John 10:28-29; Romans 5:1; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 John 5:13).

Christian Life and Priorities. Christians are called to live a holy life. They are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and as such, to live lives of service and testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit. This service includes ministry in the assembly and propagation of the gospel to the whole world. They are forbidden by Christ to lay up treasures on earth and are promised a reward in heaven for faithfulness in serving God on earth (Matthew 6:19-34; Mark 8:34-35; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 John 2:6).

Spiritual Gifts. Christ gives to each believer, at conversion, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, some gift or gifts to equip him to serve the Lord and edify other believers. Gifts are given by a sovereign act of God's Spirit and not in response to the desires or prayers of men. Some gifts were foundational, and the miraculous gifts, such as healing, miracles, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, were gifts given as a sign to the Jews during the transitional period as the church was being established. These foundational and miraculous gifts ceased when their purposes were accomplished (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Corinthians 14:22; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:20; Ephesians 3:6; Ephesians 4:11-12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Future Events. God has revealed different dispensations, or stewardships, with corresponding rules governing life and relationship with God. In every dispensation the way of salvation is by faith alone. The present dispensation is the age of grace. The church did not exist prior to this age, and does not take the place of Israel in the prophecies of Scripture. The personal, imminent return of the Lord Jesus to Rapture the Church will be followed in order by the tribulation. Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, and the eternal state of punishment for the unsaved and blessing for the saved (Matthew 24:21; Matthew 24:29-30; Matthew 25:46; Romans 6:14; 1 Corinthians 10:32; Ephesians 3:2-6; Colossians 1:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10; Hebrews 7:18-19; Revelation 10:1-6).

Each believer in fellowship must be absolute agreement with the assembly on the MAJOR DOCTRINES in the doctrinal statement. In secondary matters nonessentials, or matters of moral indifference, there shall be liberty. However, those in fellowship who hold opposing views to the doctrinal statement of the assembly shall refrain from teaching their views either publicly or privately. No one shall be permitted to propagate views that are contrary to the doctrinal statement or that prove divisive.

03.13. A Sample Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage

A Sample Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage

God instituted marriage for the human race before the Fall (Genesis 2:18-25) and the Lord Jesus blessed the institution or marriage by performing His first miracle at a wedding (John 2:1-11). Marriage should be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed should be kept free from all defilement (Hebrews 13:4 NASB).

God's will is that a person should have only one living partner in marriage (Ephesians 5:33). The relationship should not be severed by man (Matthew 19:3-9), but should continue until the death of one partner (Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

Divorce was never God's intention for His people. In fact, He hates unscriptural divorce (Malachi 2:16). However, under the law of Moses, divorce was permitted for almost any reason as long as a man gave his wife a certificate showing that she was put away legally (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). This permission was granted because of the hardness or the people's hearts (Matthew 19:7-8). When Jesus came, He tightened the divorce law:

"I say unto you that every one who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32 NASB). This means that marriage is indissoluble except when one partner is unfaithful. In that case, the innocent party is free to obtain a divorce. However, he does not have to obtain it; grace is able to triumph over his partner's sin. God is able to make even this work together for good (Romans 8:28). But if the innocent party chooses to divorce his mate, he is free to remarry; otherwise a divorce would be no different than separation.

If an unbeliever deserts a believer, the believer is not under bondage (1 Corinthians 7:16). This may mean that desertion is also a Scriptural ground for divorce. We believe, however, that it assumes that the unbeliever leaves to live in a sinful relationship, in which case the divorce would be permitted on the ground of unchastity (Matthew 6:32). In this instance, as in all instances, God's ideal is reconciliation.

Many people have already contracted unscriptural divorces and remarriages before their conversion. When they are born again, all such sins are covered by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7). The sins are forgiven and the new believer is expected to continue in whatever marriage relationship he is in at the time. If he is divorced without Scriptural cause and neither he nor his wife are remarried, he may be reconciled to his spouse or remain unmarried.

If a Christian is divorced for an unscriptural reason and then remarries, he commits adultery. This calls for his excommunication from the local church. Fellowship may also be denied to anyone who deliberately contracts an unscriptural divorce. However, even in such cases, if a man genuinely repents and confesses his sin, he is restored to fellowship with God and should be restored to fellowship with God's people.

Many complicated marital problems arise which are too involved to cover in a paper like this. Ultimately the elders will have to investigate thoroughly, try to hear all sides of the problem, then make a decision in the fear of God. The rest of the saints are obligated to abide by the decision of the elders and not create any disunity by taking sides against them.

03.14. Women's Role In the Church

Women's Role In the Church (The following is a sample position paper which may prove helpful to elders in formulating their own.) The pertinent Scripture passages are: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 1 Corinthians 14:34-37 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14. From these passages we learn of two areas of submission:

Submission through Head Covering i. A woman should have her head covered when she prays or prophesies. Otherwise she dishonors her head (1 Corinthians 11:5; 1 Corinthians 11:13). ii. The head covering in 1 Corinthians 11:5 is obviously a veil, not the woman's hair. iii. The reasons for this practice transcend time and culture.

1. Order of creation (1 Corinthians 11:8).
2. Purpose of creation (1 Corinthians 11:9).
3. Onlooking angels (1 Corinthians 11:10).

Submission through Silence iv. She should keep silent in the assembly. She is to learn in silence. She is not to speak or ask questions (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). v. She should not teach or usurp authority over man (1 Timothy 2:12). vi. The reasons for this practice also transcend time and culture.

1. Order of creation (1 Timothy 2:13).
2. Woman being deceived In the original sin (1 Timothy 2:14).

We freely admit that there are difficulties in connection with the whole subject of women's place in the assembly. It is our desire to adhere as closely as possible to the Word of God; therefore, we have adopted the following position, in the fear of the Lord, until He gives us further light on the subject.

03.15. Meetings of the Assembly

Meetings of the Assembly An assembly meeting is a gathering consisting of the saints, the elders, and the deacons (Php 1:1). convened for the apostles' doctrine (teaching), fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). This would include the following meetings of those in fellowship at this chapel:

Sun. 11:00 A.M. Bible Teaching 6:00 P.M. Lord's Supper Wed. 7:00 P.M. Prayer Meeting The following are not considered meetings of the assembly:

Sun. 9:30 A.M. Sunday, School & Bible Training Classes Thur. 1:30 P.M. Home Evangelistic Bible Study.

03.16. Women's Silence

Women's Silence

During those meetings which are meetings of the assembly, the women should remain silent (except in the case of a prayer when the participants are divided according to sex and the women pray in groups by themselves). If they have prayer requests, comments or announcements, they can ask their husbands to share them. Unmarried women or women whose husbands are not in attendance may ask any of the men in the assembly to share them.

During the meetings that are not meetings of the assembly, the women are allowed to participate in the discussion and ask questions but not to lead men in prayer or teach men.

Sisters should be covered in all meetings, including those meetings that are not considered meetings of the assembly. In the meetings of the assembly it is presumed that they will be praying silently. In the non-assembly meetings, it is also likely that women will be praying silently when men are present, and may be teaching other women and children when men are not present. Visitors, both saved and unsaved, will often come to all these meetings uncovered. Hopefully, they will learn by the example of our sisters, and eventually through direct teaching from the Word.

03.17. Ministries for Women

Ministries for Women

While the Scriptures set some limits on the exercise of a woman's priesthood, there are ministries which are open to her. In the local assembly, these include silent prayer and worship (1 Corinthians 11:5; 1 Corinthians 14:35); teaching and personal work with other women and children (Titus 2:3-5); and hospitality (Hebrews 13:2). There are ministries open to her outside the assembly but in conjunction with it. These include raising a family for God (1 Timothy 2:15); giving (Luke 8:3); collaborating with her husband in support of his ministry; engaging in projects for missionaries at home and abroad, and visiting the sick and the afflicted.

03.18. Summary

Summary

Once again we emphasize that there are situations that are not clearly spelled out in the Word of God. Our desire is to adhere as closely as possible to the Scriptures. Also, we believe it is important for all who are in fellowship in this assembly to follow a consistent policy and thus avoid confusion. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

03.19. The Prayer Meeting

The Prayer Meeting The prayer meeting was in progress. A few older saints had met for that purpose in an upper room of the chapel. But no one was praying. No one was saying a word. The silence was deafening. Then the stillness was broken by the slow, heavy clumping of footsteps on the stairs. A large black woman entered the room and sat down. Still no one prayed. Finally she couldn't stand it any longer. She lifted up her voice and prayed. "Lawd, ah knows this place is dead. You knows this place is dead. It's the deadest place either of us has been in for a long time." Then she rose and departed. After that there were no silent periods in that particular meeting. Perhaps she was an angel, sent to revive a dying prayer meeting, and a dying assembly.

There is no reason why a prayer meeting can't be meaningful, interesting and effective. And a meeting like this is guaranteed to be well-attended. Yet in many churches today the prayer meeting has been given up as a lost cause and replaced by a small group fellowship, a teaching service or a time of "sharing".

Some of the factors that have contributed to the death of the prayer meeting are participation by only the same few people every week: predictable prayers; long, dull pauses; crowding out of prayer by other activities. How can we deal with these problems?

First we must humbly acknowledge that there is a problem and then be willing to make changes.

Generally speaking it is true that people enjoy a meeting when they have some part in it themselves. So our first goal is to increase participation in the prayer meeting. How can we do this in a Scriptural manner? Suggestion: have the men break up in small groups and pray in one section of a fairly large room, and the women do the same in another area of the same room. Movable chairs are ideal for this arrangement; fixed pews are not. In a meeting like this everyone has the opportunity to pray, and in small groups, people usually pray more than once. But of course there has to be a good supply of fuel for prayer. This need not be a problem. The person opening the meeting asks for worship and praise items; prayer requests; answers to prayer; etc. The Christians know that they should come equipped with paper and pencil to write down these requests; there will be far too many to remember.

Preliminaries such as singing, announcements, etc. should be kept to a minimum. Prayer is the main thing. Even ministry of the Word could be advantageously planned for another time. When the praying begins, there is a low, sacred sound of praise and petition filling the room, but no confusion. People hear only the prayers being offered in their own group. The time will pass quickly. Young people will feel free to participate freely. Everyone will welcome the change. The experience of multitudes is that prayer in a format like this is a joy and not just a duty. It is so stimulating that people don't want to stay away. There is a sense of personal involvement, or sharing the joys and sorrows of others, and of seeing answers to prayer continually.

03.20. Privileges of Fellowship

Privileges of Fellowship In an Assembly The promised presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:20). The privilege of collective worship (The Lord's Supper-- 1 Corinthians 11:1-34). The privilege of collective prayer (Acts 2:42).

Instruction In the Word. The blessing of serving with others:

Sunday School teaching

Gospel

Visitation Tract work, etc. The privilege of giving. The privilege of fellowship. The family tie in times of trial. A worldwide fellowship.

03.21. Responsibilities of Fellowship

Responsibilities of Fellowship In the Assembly Exercise one's own spiritual gift.

Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit.

Attend meetings faithfully.

Share in expenses and in fellowship with commended workers.

Pursue personal holiness.

Practice mutual help, exhortation and edification.

Love one another (1 Peter 4:8).

Share in the ministry of hospitality.

Share in work at the Chapel-- cleaning, etc.

03.22. Decently and in Order

Decently and in Order The Public Meetings of the Assembly In discussing the conduct of public meetings of the church, the Apostle Paul ends with this admonition: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). The NIV says to let them be done in a "fitting and orderly way." The NASB renders it, "properly and in an orderly manner."

Whatever the version, the meaning seems clear. The Spirit of God desires that our public meetings be such as to inspire a sense that "God is truly among you" (1 Corinthians 14:25). We need to consider the one who occupies the place of the uninformed" (NKJV 1 Corinthians 14:16), not just the initiated ones. Certainly we do not wish unbelievers to come in, observe our services and say, "You are out of your mind" (1 Corinthians 14:23). It is to be desired that "all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26), not confusion or boredom.

It may not be apparent to us who are familiar with the ways in which we conduct public meetings of the church that others sometimes do not find things being done "decently and in order." They think that we appear to be disorganized, haphazard, and casual to the point of disrespect to the Lord and Savior we seek to honor. If we have as our goal the retention of those who visit our meetings, especially those who are serious about God, then we ought to consider how to improve things. In most instances, we cannot think of a Scripture that forbids such changes as we would suggest. However, 1 Corinthians 14:40 would seem to support the need for upgrading in a serious way how we do things.

Many disastrous occurrences or arrangements seem to be the product of a mindset which regards unplanned disorder and uncritical repetition as being somehow a matter of leaving it all to the Spirit. It does not seem fair to blame God for the kind of things sometimes taking place. Another mistake is to assume that, in the name of giving opportunity for the development of gift, all the males of the assembly be given a turn at almost everything. This really ignores whether there is any indication that they have such gift. If we take seriously 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and like passages, it should be evident that not all brethren are public preachers, song-leaders or chairmen by divinely-given aptitude. Perhaps they could better serve in the areas of helps, service, mercy and hospitality-where there is a great lack. In the interest of improving our public meetings, we offer the following checklist, which is only a partial one, for starters. Much could be said beyond these few suggestions.

Meetings

People come to church to sense the presence of God. Is this what is conveyed in your service? Or is it more like a luncheon club or public social hour? At times we sound like a convention of magpies.

Whether or not you consider the service to be devoted to "worship" -- there needs to be an atmosphere of reverence for God and awareness of Him when Scriptures are read or expounded and when prayer is made. A reverential atmosphere is maintained when we hold latecomers at the

door during these parts of the service.

Get your audience in their seats and quiet (hopefully) at the starting time. Encourage this in your bulletin. Pre-service music may help. Example by "regulars" is important. Good ushering is essential.

Discourage wandering up and down the aisles during preaching and praying. Seat late comers at the rear, parents with small children, or those needing to visit the restroom frequently, to sit it the back, not at the front or in the middle of a row. The church service is not a bus terminal. It is amazing how wanderlust and physical "urgency" assault people in one brief hour on Sunday.

Prayer -- Scripture Reading

Pray to God as though He has heard your prayer and make it one that needs His favorable response. Remember that it was the Pharisee who "prayed thus with himself" (Luke 18:11). Make sure listeners can hear and join in thought. Be brief in prayer. Jesus condemned long public prayers, especially if they were to impress others.

Public Scripture readings also should be brief. People cannot retain and focus on too many thoughts or verses. Identify the main thought you are seeking to emphasize and relate it to the sermon to be preached.

Read the Word slowly, reverently, distinctly, with proper emphasis. The reader should look up at times to make eye contact with the audience. Have the people stand and listen with respect (Nehemiah 8:5). The effect can be electric.

Announcements

These should be distinct, easily heard, enthusiastic, warm, friendly. The announcer should wear a coat and tie. He should look at his audience when talking -- not at his notes

Know in advance the details, proper pronunciation of names, correct times, written on a single sheet -- NO last minute slips of paper, with indecipherable scribbling, should be accepted en route to the platform. Be brief -- brief -- brief! Use "handouts" at the door for details. Signup sheets should be made available after the service, not during it.

Don't trivialize the service by trivial announcements.

Don't repeat previous announcements of routine meeting times. Don't read announcements already in the church bulletin. Refer the listeners to the bulletin.

Avoid jargon and in house' phrases, referring to speakers as "Bill" or "Joe" when they are unknown to the visitors.

Introduce the speaker properly with warm enthusiasm. Use his full name, say something about him and his subject of ministry or sermon title. It is a discourtesy not to present a speaker properly to his audience.

Never use slang, such as referring to men as "guys" or inviting visitors to "hang around" after a meeting. or using other undignified language. Speak with what is called "class" or good platform manners.

Ushers

Choose warm, friendly people who can greet visitors or others in a gracious way, making them feel welcome. Don't just assign people to handouts hymnbooks or bulletins. People sense when they are receiving a plastic smile and a mechanical handshake or greeting.

Guide people to their seats (true ushering), filling the front sections first. Rope off the back areas for late comers.

Wear a coat and tie--not casual dress.

Train those ushering in special sessions to emphasize how to improve their function. Have a regular, dependable crew who know what they are doing.

Music The song-leader should be the most gifted person for this role. Variety here is not "the spice of life" but apt to be "the joke of the week."

Hymns should never be picked out at the last minute, any more than the song-leader. Match the hymns with the message, where possible. Be sure the audience knows the hymns, or arrange to teach them one at a time. Please do not ask for favorites from the audience. Consider the effect when either the songleader or the audience does not know the song.

Use a fresh, contemporary, Scriptural, inspiring hymn or chorus from time to time. That will require a survey and screening process beforehand.

Coordinate hymns ahead of time with your accompanist (where used) so that there is no mix-up. Be careful in selecting soloists or groups for "special music." Not all of it is good. The service is not the community "amateur hour." Make sure dress is neat and appropriate. Verify arrangements in advance; inquire on needed sound equipment.

Reduce the "between hymns chatter" or commentary. Stick to the main task. The song-leader is not chosen to be a "funny man", cheerleader, or preacher. Bring reverence as well as spiritual vitality to our singing. The Scottish people excel at this as they sing the Psalms. When preaching time must be abbreviated because of too many hymns or too many stanzas, there is a miscarriage in proper emphasis. Fit the music into its agreed time frame.

Visitors It says something when visitors come once and never return. What it says is not good!

Warmth, friendliness, love, and a welcoming atmosphere are the chief characteristics noted by visitors. This often is more important than the sermon itself.

Please get visitors' names, addresses, phone numbers, and the "contact" through whom they happened to visit. Make sure they are introduced to others. See that friendly people talk to them after the service.

Keep records of all visitors. Send a warm welcome letter and something about the assembly that is oriented to their needs or interest.

Call them on the telephone the same week they came. Visit in person as soon as possible. Invite them to a meal. Have a hospitality program for new comers, sporadic attendees and even neglected people in the assembly. Is your assembly a "private club" or is it genuinely open to

newcomers? How do you show this? Have care for infants and smaller children at services. Let teams be varied so that all can hear the Word some of the time. Why let crying, restless children disturb the meeting for all? If mothers insist on bringing their children, seat them at the rear and encourage taking them out when they disturb the meeting. Is your building neat and well-maintained? Are your restrooms neat and clean? Is there an adequate, highly-visible, attractive sign out front which is lighted at night? Is the yard well maintained? Is the parking adequate? Can the members park away from the chapel and leave the near places for visitors? In Summary Have the people who are the most fitted for a particular job be the ones who do it. This is Scriptural. Give instructions, using written materials such as this to emphasize the proper way to do things. Seek constantly to upgrade all of your functions. Nothing is too good in the service of the King. Pray and plan ahead. This can be more "of the Spirit" than last minute "confusion worse confounded." Glorify God in your public services. That should be your first priority.

O. J. Gibson

03.23. Parachurch Organizations

Parachurch Organizations

PRO

Parachurch organizations carry on ministries that the church cannot do, or should be doing but is not, e.g., translation, publishing, radio, TV, prison work, evangelism, discipline, counseling, etc.

They reach vast segments of the population that are untouched by the churches.

Many people who are turned off by the church ("all the church wants is your money") can be effectively reached by parachurch ministries. In missions, social services, evangelism and church planting, parachurch organizations have taken the lead.

Whereas the organized church often requires formalized training for its full-time workers, the parachurch organizations train lay persons and put them to work.

They provide ministry outlets that Christians do not find in local churches.

They provide honorable, salaried employment for some.

They are effectively bearing fruit. God is blessing them.

Churches tend to emphasize buildings more than missions.

Churches are inflexible, resistant to change. Parachurch organizations are an answer to this lack of flexibility.

CON

Parachurch organizations are unbiblical. They are nowhere found in the Acts or elsewhere in the New Testament. The church is God's unit on earth for propagating the faith. Everywhere the apostles went they planted churches. Everywhere we go we establish parachurch organizations.

Men and women are diverted from the local church. Preachers, teachers and leaders are taken away from their primary ministry and seated behind a desk as administrators.

Money is diverted from the local church, yet these organizations depend on the churches for their support.

People serving with a parachurch organization cannot carry out the Great Commission "teaching to observe all things" because they cannot declare the full counsels of God. In trying to relate to many different churches, they tend to weaken their doctrinal position.

There are many overlapping and competing ministries, with factions, jealousies and rivalries.

They are not accountable to anyone but themselves.

Some parachurch people tend to be antichurch.

Others who have a parachurch mentality often find it difficult to adapt to the fellowship of a local church and to function with the broad mix of people found in most congregations. They consider themselves (and often are) a select group of committed people.

They usurp functions and responsibilities that belong to the churches.

Instead of feeding converts into local churches, the organization tends to take the place of the church in the lives of the people.

Arguments Against Parachurch Organizations That May Be Equally True Of Churches They do not die easily but are often perpetuated after they have outlived their usefulness.

There is a danger of focusing on a charismatic leader, and of thus establishing a personality cult.

They do not meet the total needs of the people.

They are often characterized by competitive spirit, infighting, duplication of ministries. and divisions.

They are sometimes the result of a person's inability to work with others. In frustration he starts a work where he can be independent.

They promote professionalism, climbing up the corporate ladder, etc.

04.01. Lord, Break Me!

Lord, Break Me! by William MacDonald

“The brokenness of spirit which makes no resistance to the Father’s hand is a main element of fertility in souls wherein He works. It is not power He seeks from us, but weakness; not resistant force, but ‘yieldingness’ to Him. All power is His: His strength is perfected in weakness.”
—Selected

04.02. Foreword

Foreword Thirty years after Andrew Murray wrote *Abide in Christ*, he said:

I would like you to know that a minister or Christian author may often be led to say more than he has experienced. I had not then [when he wrote *Abide in Christ*] experienced all that I wrote of. I cannot say that I have experienced it all perfectly now. Was it not in this same spirit that the Apostle Paul wrote:

Now that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own (Php 3:12).

I share the same sentiment with regard to the following article, *Lord, Break Me!* The burden of the Lord is on me to write these things. The truth is too sublime and too urgent to be withheld simply because I have failed to experience it in full. To whatever extent I have failed, I make the things I have written the aspiration of my heart.

William MacDonald

04.03. God Values Broken Things

God Values Broken Things

Usually when something is broken, its value declines or disappears altogether. Broken dishes, broken bottles, broken mirrors are generally scrapped. Even a crack in furniture or a tear in cloth greatly reduces its resale value. But it isn't that way in the spiritual realm. God puts a premium on broken things—especially on broken people. That is why we read such verses as: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit (Psalms 34:18). The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalms 51:17).

God knows how to resist the proud and haughty, but He cannot resist a person who is humble and contrite.

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). There is something in our brokenness that appeals to His compassion and power. And so part of His wonderful purpose for our lives is that we should be broken—broken in heart, broken in spirit, and broken even in body (2 Corinthians 4:6-18).

04.04. Conversion A Form Of Brokenness

Conversion A Form Of Brokenness

We are introduced to the breaking process prior to our conversion when the Holy Spirit begins His work of convicting us of sin. He must get us to the place where we are willing to confess we are lost, unworthy, deserving only of hell. We fight every step of the way. But He continues to wrestle with us until our pride is shattered, our boasting tongue is silenced and all resistance gone. Lying at the foot of the Cross, we finally whisper, "Lord Jesus, save me!" The shrew has been tamed, the sinner has been mastered, the colt has been broken.

Yes, the colt has been broken. By nature the colt is a wild, lawless creature. At the merest suggestion of a bridle or a saddle, it will rear, bolt, leap and kick. It may be a beautiful, well-proportioned animal, but as long as it is unbroken, it is useless as far as service is concerned. But then comes the painful, prolonged process of bending the colt's will so that it will submit to the harness. Once the colt's will has been conquered by a higher will, the animal finds the real reason for its existence. In this connection, it is good for us to remember that the Lord Jesus was a Carpenter in Nazareth, and as such He may have made wooden yokes. Someone has beautifully suggested that if there had been a sign over the door of His shop, it probably would have read, "My yokes fit well." But the point for us is that our divine Lord is still a yoke maker. He says,

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:29-30).

However, yokes are only for those who are broken and submissive. Our wills must be subdued and yielded before we can learn of Him. He was gentle and lowly in heart. We must become like Him, and only in so doing will we find rest for our hearts.

04.05. Elements Of Brokenness

Elements Of Brokenness But that brings us to the basic question, “What is meant by true brokenness? How does it manifest itself in a believer’s life? What are some of its basic elements?”

1. Repentance, Confession, Apology

Perhaps one of the first things we think of is a readiness to confess sin to God and to those we have wronged. The broken man is quick to repent. He does not try to sweep sin under the carpet. He does not try to forget it with the excuse, “Time heals all things.” He rushes into the presence of God and cries, “I have sinned.” Then he goes to whoever has been hurt by his actions and says, “I was wrong. I am sorry. I want you to forgive me.” If on the one hand he knows the scalding shame of having to apologize, on the other he knows the great release of having a clear conscience and of walking in the light.

True confession does not gloss over sin or blunt its reality. It is not like the unbroken matron who said with hauteur, “If I have done anything wrong, I am willing to be forgiven.” Genuine repentance says, “I have done wrong and I’m here to say that I’m sorry.”

David’s life was clouded by sin and failure, but the thing that endeared him to God’s heart was his deep penitence. In Psalms 32:1-11; Psalms 51:1-19 we retrace with him his transgressions, sin and iniquity. We watch him during the time when he refused to repent; life then was physical, mental and spiritual misery. Nothing went right. It seemed that everything was out of joint. Finally he broke. He confessed and God forgave. Then the bells began to ring again and David recovered his song. In the New Testament, Paul gives us an illustration of brokenness. It was at the time he appeared before the chief priests and Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. When he prefaced his remarks with a statement that he had always lived in good conscience, the high priest was infuriated and ordered that the prisoner be slapped on the mouth. The apostle snapped back, “God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” (Acts 23:3). The attendants were shocked by Paul’s scathing rebuke. Didn’t he know that he was speaking to the high priest? Actually the apostle did not know. Maybe Ananias was not wearing his official robes or occupying his usual seat. Or perhaps it was Paul’s weak eyesight again. Whatever the reason, he had not intentionally spoken evil of the duly constituted ruler. So he quickly apologized for his words, quoting Exodus 22:28, “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.” The apostle had a low breaking point. He demonstrated his spiritual maturity by his readiness to say, “I was wrong. I am sorry.”

2. Restitution

Closely connected with this first aspect of brokenness is prompt restitution, wherever it is called for. If I have stolen, damaged or injured something, or if someone else has suffered loss because of my misbehavior, it is not enough to apologize. Justice demands that the loss be repaid. This applies to what happened before my conversion as well as to what happens afterwards.

After Zacchaeus had received the Lord Jesus, he remembered some of the crooked deals he had pulled as a tax-collector. It was a divine instinct that taught him immediately that these wrongs must be made right. So he said to the Lord, "...if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." Here the "if" does not express any doubt or indecision. The idea is "in every case where I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." His determination to make restitution was a fruit of his conversion. The "fourfold" was a gauge of the vitality of his new life.

There are cases where it is impossible to make restitution. Perhaps records have been destroyed, or exact amounts have been forgotten with the passing of time. God knows all about this. All He wants is that we pay back what we owe in every case where we can. And this should always be done in the Name of the Lord Jesus. There is no glory for God in it if I just say, "I stole this. I am sorry. Now I want to pay you back." The action should be linked with a testimony for Christ, such as, "I have recently become a Christian through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has been speaking to me about some tools I stole from you five years ago. I have come to apologize and to return the tools." Every act of righteousness or kindness which a Christian does should be combined with a witness for the Savior so that He and not self gets the glory.

3. A Forgiving Spirit A third element of brokenness is the willingness to forgive when we have been wronged. In many cases this takes as much grace as apologizing or making restitution.

Actually the New Testament is surprisingly explicit in laying down instructions for us in this manner of forgiving others.

First of all, whenever we have been wronged, we should immediately forgive the person in our hearts (Ephesians 4:32). We do not go to him yet and tell him he is forgiven, but in our hearts we have actually forgiven him. The moment a man wrongs me, I must forgive him. Then my soul is free. If I hold the wrong against him, I sin against God, and against him and jeopardize my forgiveness with God. Whether the man repents, makes amends, asks my pardon or not, makes no difference. I have instantly forgiven him. He must face God with the wrong he has done, but that is his affair and God's and not mine, save that I should help him according to Matthew 18:15, etc. But whether this succeeds or not and before this even begins, I must forgive him (Lenski).

There are multitudes of little wrongs that can be forgiven and forgotten immediately. It is real victory when we can do it. "Love...does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people" (1 Corinthians 13:7, J. B. Phillips). A Christian lady was once asked, "Don't you remember the mean thing that that catty woman said to you?" Her reply was, "I not only don't remember; I distinctly remember forgetting."

If the wrong is of a more serious nature and you do not feel it would be righteous to let it pass, then the next step is to go to the offender and speak to him about it (Matthew 18:15). If he repents, then you must forgive him. "And if he sins against you seven times in the day and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (Luke 17:4). It is only right that we should be willing to forgive indefinitely. After all, we have been and are forgiven times without number.

Notice that you are not to go and tell everyone else about the offender's fault (that is what we almost invariably do). "Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." The obvious strategy is to keep these differences as confined as possible. As soon as the offending brother confesses his sin, you tell him that he is forgiven. You have already forgiven him in your heart, but now you

can administer forgiveness to him. But suppose he refuses to repent. Then in accordance with Matthew 18:16, you “take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

If he refuses to listen to the two or three witnesses, then the matter should be taken to the local fellowship of Christians. The purpose in all this is not vindictiveness or punishment, but the restoration of the offending brother.

If this final effort fails, he is to be looked upon as a Gentile and a tax-collector. In other words, you no longer treat him as one who is in fellowship in the local church. Since he is not acting like a Christian, you accept him on his own ground. You count him as an unbeliever. But as soon as he repents, then you forgive him and full fellowship is restored.

God hates an unforgiving spirit, the determination to carry grudges to the grave, the unwillingness to let bygones be bygones. This is brought out forcefully in the parable of the debtor servant (Matthew 18:23-25). When he himself was bankrupt, he had been forgiven by the king a million dollars. But then he was unwilling to forgive a fellow servant a few dollars. The lesson is clear. Since God forgave us when we were in debt over our heads, we should be willing to forgive others who owe us trifles.

4. Enduring Wrong Without Retaliating But there are other aspects of brokenness. One is the humble spirit that suffers for doing right and does not retaliate. Here, of course, our Lord is the prime Example. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). We have all been called to this type of life. For one is approved, if mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God’s approval (1 Peter 2:19-20). In his book, *From Grace to Glory*,¹ Murdoch Campbell reminds us that John Wesley had a wife who made his life a trial of fire. For hours she would literally drag him around the room by his hair. And the founder of Methodism never uttered a harsh word to her.

Campbell also tells of “a godly Highland minister who was married to a similar woman. He sat one day in his room reading his Bible. The door opened and his wife entered. Her hand snatched the Book from him and threw it into the fire. He looked into her face and quietly made the remark, ‘I never sat at a warmer fire.’ It was an answer that turned away her wrath and marked the beginning of a new and gracious life. His Jezebel became a Lydia. The thorn became a lily.” A great saint of God has said, “It is the mark of deepest and truest humility to see ourselves condemned without cause and to be silent under it. To be silent under insult and wrong is a very noble imitation of our Lord. ‘Oh, my Lord, when I remember in how many ways Thou didst suffer, who in no way deserved it, I know not where my senses are when I am in such haste to defend and excuse myself. Is it possible I should desire anyone to speak any good of me or to think it, when so many ill things were thought and spoken of Thee?’” (*Living Patiently*, J. Allen Blair, pp. 353, 4).

5. Repaying Evil With Good An additional advance in the life of brokenness is not only to bear wrong patiently but to reward every wrong with a kindness.

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. “...if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon

his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17; Romans 12:20-21).

Here I am always reminded of the elephant that was being driven down an Indian street by its owner. The man was carrying a sharp-pointed steel goad to keep the lumbering beast moving along. Then the owner lost his grip on the goad and it fell to the ground with a resounding clang. The long-suffering elephant turned around, picked up the goad with its trunk, and held it out to the master. If elephants could be Christians, that elephant certainly was one.

6. Honoring Others Above Self And then there is the brand of brokenness that esteems others better than one’s self (Php 2:3). We see it illustrated in an incident from Abram’s life (Genesis 13:1-13). He and Lot had come up from Egypt to the Negeb and then to Bethel with their families and possessions. Both men had extensive flocks and herds, and soon a quarrel developed between their hired hands over pasture land. It was at this point that Abram stepped in and said, in effect, “Look, Lot, we are not going to part company over a few bales of hay. You take whatever pasturage you want, and I’ll take my animals somewhere else.” So Lot chose the lush pasture lands in the valley of the Jordan—ominously close to Sodom. Big-hearted Abram moved farther into Canaan. And so an Old Testament saint, living on the other side of Pentecost, gave us a practical demonstration of what Paul meant when he said:

Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10).

7. Prompt Obedience But this is not all. God wants us to be broken in accepting and obeying His will. The psalmist puts it concisely: Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you (Psalms 32:9). The tendency for a spirited horse is to jump the gun, whereas the mule symbolizes stubbornness and intransigence. So we have the two dangers in connection with the will of God. It is possible to move on without clear direction, to run without being sent. And then again it is possible to willfully resist the clear guidance of the Lord.

Jonah, for example. There was no question as to what God wanted him to do. He was called to go and preach repentance to Nineveh. But he was not broken as yet. So he boarded a ship going in the opposite direction. Only after his nightmarish experience in the whale’s belly was his will bent to obey. Then he went forth to prove that God’s will is, after all, good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2). We get a surprising picture of brokenness in the colt which Jesus rode into Jerusalem (Luke 19:29-35). Up to that time no man had ever ridden on that animal, and it could have been expected to vigorously resist any attempt to mount it. But when the Savior approached, it experienced a miracle of instant brokenness. The will of the colt became completely submissive to the will of its Creator.

It might be mixing metaphors to introduce clay in a discussion on brokenness, but the clay in the hands of a potter is an apt description of what a broken person is in the Lord’s hands—pliable and responsive to the pressure of His fingers. And so the daily prayer of the submissive saint is: Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.

Mould me and make me after Thy will, While I am waiting, yielded and still. Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Search me and try me, Master, today!

Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now, As in Thy presence humbly I bow. Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Wounded and weary, help me, I pray!

Power—all power—surely is Thine!

Touch me and heal me, Savior divine! Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Hold o'er my being absolute sway!

Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see Christ only, always, living in me!

8. Death To Public Opinion

There are many other aspects of brokenness. For instance, we need to be brought to the place where we are dead to the world's applause or frowns. After W. P. Nicholson was saved, he came under the tutelage of a Salvation Army officer. One day the officer said to him, "If you mean business for God, wear this sign-board for a few hours in the center of town." On the board were lettered the words "DEAD TO PUBLIC OPINION." This experience had a profound effect on all Nicholson's life of fearless service for Christ.

9. Confessing Others' Sins As Our Own

We need to be so broken that we will confess the sins of God's people as our own. This is what Daniel did (Daniel 9:3-19). He was not personally guilty of most of the sins he catalogued. But he identified himself so closely with the nation of Israel that their sins became his sin. In this he reminds us, of course, of the One who "took our sins and our sorrows and made them His very own." And the lesson for us is that instead of criticizing other believers and pointing the accusing finger, we should confess their sins as if they were our own.

10. Keeping One's Cool In The Crises A final aspect of brokenness involves poise and equanimity in the crises of life. When an unavoidable delay occurs, the natural reaction is to fuss and fume. Interruptions to the regular routine often provoke annoyance and fretfulness. Mechanical breakdowns and accidents—how easily they upset us and even cause tempers to flare. Schedule changes and disappointments have a way of bringing out the worst that is in us. The frenzy, the ruffled feathers, the anger and the hysteria that all these things arouse are ruinous to the Christian testimony, to say the least. The way of brokenness is to keep one's cool during these crises, knowing that God is overruling all the circumstances of life for His purposes. The flat tire may be a blessing in disguise, saving you from a crash farther down the expressway. The unexpected visitor who interrupts your service for the Lord may actually present a more important ministry than what you are doing. The accident, with all its suffering, inconvenience and expense, may bring you in touch with people who have been prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the gospel. In all these circumstances, the Lord desires to see us react instantly with calmness instead of impatience, with brokenness instead of rebellion.

These then are a few examples of what is meant by brokenness. The list is suggestive but certainly not exhaustive. As we walk in fellowship with the Lord, He will show us areas in our individual lives where we need to be broken at the foot of the Cross. And with each such revelation He will give the needed grace. For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Php 2:13).

04.06. What Brokenness Does Not Mean

What Brokenness Does Not Mean

Having seen what some of the elements of brokenness are, we should explain briefly what is not meant by the word. It does not mean that the person becomes a Mr. Milquetoast, a bland, spineless sort of jellyfish. It does not mean that he becomes a powerless cipher, exerting little influence on those around him. If anything, the reverse is true. Brokenness is one of the finest elements of a strong character. It doesn't take any discipline to be unbroken. But what self-control is required to be Christ-like when every natural instinct rebels against it!

Broken people are the ones with the most persuasive characters. They influence quietly by the irresistible force of an other-worldly example. It is a paradox, but there it is: "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Psalms 18:35, A.V.). And they are capable of anger when occasion demands it. We see this in the life of our Lord. He drove the money changers out of the Temple with a scourge of small cords. But the important thing to see is that His anger flared not because of any wrong that was done to Him personally, but because His Father's house had been dishonored. As has been said, "He was a lion in God's cause but a lamb in His own." Many of the martyrs and reformers were truly broken but one would hardly say that they were weak or uninfluential.

04.07. The Generation Gap

The Generation Gap

One of the most difficult areas in which to exercise brokenness appears to be in the child-parent relationship. By some queer quirk of fallen human nature, we seem to be most unloving to those who are closest to us. Many Christian girls wage a constant battle within themselves because of the hostility they feel toward their mothers. And just as many Christian fellows are scarcely civil to their fathers most of the time. No one denies the existence of a generation gap; actually it is an enormous gulf. The younger people complain that their parents don't understand them, that they are repressive, that they are out of touch with the times, that they belong to the establishment. But in spite of it all, many youth feel guilt and shame that they cannot seem to rise above these attitudes and act like Christians for a change toward their folks. They realize it is colossal defeat that they can be so kind and personable to their peers and even to other adults and yet so cold and cutting at home. They hate themselves for often wishing their parents were dead, but to break and confess is a hard pill to swallow.

It was no accident that when God gave ten basic laws to the nation of Israel, one of them should deal with this difficult and delicate area of human relations:

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Exodus 20:12).

Paul repeats the command in the New Testament:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3). To honor and obey one's parents means not only to do what they say, but to respect them, to be kind to them, and to care for them whenever necessary. Paul gives four reasons:

1. It is right 2. It is for the young people's own good 3. It is Scriptural 4. It promotes a full life. But many fellows and girls have almost convinced themselves that while it may be possible in other cases, it simply isn't possible in theirs. THEIR parents are too overbearing, too square.

All that is needed, of course, is brokenness. What this will mean will be to go to the father or mother or both and say, "Look, I'm sorry that I've been such a heel in my relationships with you. I've never thanked you for all you have done for me, but I want to do it now. I want you to forgive me for the way I've built up walls of resistance between us. By God's help, I want things to be different in the future." The timeless illustration of bridging the generation gap is the story of the prodigal son. At first the ingrate couldn't wait for his father to die; he wanted the inheritance right now. Well, he got it and went off to live it up. Then followed the late-night parties, the drinks, the carousing, the sex orgies and all the rest. But finally the money was gone and so were the friends. The wastrel was reduced to bare subsistence. He began to think of the servants at home who

were living better than he. What a fool he had been! He had left home full but now he goes back empty. He had left demanding justice but he returns pleading for mercy. He had left with head high but he crawls home broken.

“Dad,” he says, “I have sinned. Sinned against God and sinned against you. I don’t deserve to be your son...” He had planned to say more, to plead for a job as a servant. But by this time the father was issuing orders to the household. And then before long, the son was dressed in a new suit, had a handsome ring on one finger, had a new pair of shoes on, and was sitting down to a sumptuous dinner of roast veal and all the trimmings. The gap had been bridged by brokenness. But the son would never have known the father’s kiss if he had not first broken in repentance and confession.

Nothing will help to straighten out a person’s attitude of hostility like the humiliation of having to make such an apology. The next time he is tempted to show any act of unlove toward a parent, he will quickly remember the scalding shame of having to break, and this will act as a powerful deterrent.

04.08. The Marital Gap

The Marital Gap

Perhaps the second most difficult area in which to manifest real brokenness is in the husband-wife relationship. Once again it is a matter of acting unkindly toward those who are closest to us, while showing charm and courtesy to those we scarcely know. Too often we have to confess that we are devils at home and saints abroad. The Bible is realistic in anticipating the possibility of tension in the marriage relationship. We think especially of Colossians 3:19 :

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. The bitterness that can develop in a husband toward his wife is often so deep that he despairs of ever rising above it. Too often he simply gives up and seeks release through separation or divorce.

Take the case of Jano and Jinx. The first time they met, they both knew they were meant for each other. During the months that followed they were together at every opportunity. By the end of six months they were engaged, and the wedding was set for six months later. But as things turned out, they were married four months after their engagement. The wedding went off with everyone playing his part in the little game quite well. And for the first year things went fairly smoothly. Then one day they had a violent quarrel and Jinx released all her suppressed disrespect of Jano for what had happened before their marriage. He repaid her in kind. The walls quivered and the windows bulged. After that it seemed that their marriage was in hopeless ruins. Jano found that the bitterness he felt toward his wife was greater than the love with which he had loved her (2 Samuel 13:15).

Friends suggested that they see a Christian marriage counselor, and they did. But underneath they were as hard and unyielding as the bars of a castle.

Finally Jano applied for a divorce. But before the case came up in court, a Christian friend challenged him to try the way of brokenness. And the friend's wife reached Jinx at the same time with the same message. Why not break before the Lord and before one another? Why not put the past under the blood of Christ and make a new start?

They did. It was the hardest thing that either had ever done. But they got together and made a complete confession. There was no hedging or self-vindication. It was as forthright a confession as one could wish for. Each one accepted responsibility for his part in their pre-marital sin. After tearful confession to the Lord, they covenanted never to reproach one another with this sin again. They claimed the promise of God that they had been forgiven (1 John 1:9). They gladly forgave each other for everything. And each one decided that he must also forgive himself. When they rose from their knees, an enormous burden had been lifted. They realized that there would still be a period of adjustment, but the nuclear cloud of bitterness and strife had dissipated. And they realized the necessity for continual brokenness whenever future problems would arise in the home.

Months later Jano put down the evening paper and commented how strange it was that people would spend time and money at marriage counselors and psychiatrists, and try any form of expensive “treatment,” but they would not try the way of brokenness. And yet without brokenness, the other things were largely ineffective.

04.09. God Wants Us All To Be Broken

God Wants Us All To Be Broken But it is not only in the child-parent relationship or in the husband-wife relationship, but in all areas of our life the Lord wants us to be broken. He will wrestle with us as He wrestled with Jacob at Peniel. He will try to break us of pride, of self-will, of an unforgiving spirit, of stubbornness, of gossip, of backbiting, of worldliness, of impurity, of temper, of every work of the flesh. He wants to change our name from Jacob to Israel, from cheat to prince, from powerless schemer to one who has power with God and man. He will wrestle with us till the breaking of the day and put our thigh out of joint. Then we will go through the rest of our life with the limp of a broken man whom God can use.

God wants us to be blameless. None of us is sinless but we can all be blameless. A blameless person is one who, when he does commit some wrong, is quick to make it right. He does not let the sun go down on his wrath. By confession and apology, he keeps the lines of communication open with God and with his fellow men. An elder in a local church must be blameless (1 Timothy 3:2), but every Christian should be.

04.10. Think Of The Results

Think Of The Results

Think what it would mean in our individual lives, in our homes, in the local church and in the business world if we were all broken as we should be. In our own lives it would mean greater power, greater happiness and better health. The men who have the greatest spiritual impact on others are those who are yoked with Christ in meekness and humility. They are the ones who find fulfillment and rest in serving Him. And what is good for us spiritually is good for our physical health as well. The British Medical Journal once reported that “there is not a tissue in the human body wholly removed from the spirit.” Dr. Paul Tournier tells of a patient who had had anemia for months. Then it mysteriously disappeared and her blood was normal again. Investigation revealed that she had had a spiritual crisis, namely, she had forgiven a long-standing grudge. Yes, brokenness is good for the health.

Think of a home where the members keep short accounts with one another. Of course there are differences from time to time, but they are not allowed to build up steam in the boiler. The family has learned the holy art of kissing and making up. That is the kind of home where Jesus loves to be. In the local assembly, brokenness is the road to revival. It is a fixed law in the spiritual realm that the tears of brokenness are the prelude to showers of blessing. We generally try everything else first—new building, new campaigns, new methods, but God is waiting for repentance and humiliation. When we repent the blessing will flow.

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14). And think of the impact that Christians would have in the business world by exhibiting brokenness. Men of the world are not broken and they like to pit their strength against others who are like them. But they are nonplussed when they bump into someone who doesn't react with anger, who admits wrong and apologizes, who exhibits the grace of the Lord Jesus. It is this supernatural kind of life that speaks loudest for Christ in the rough and tumble world of commerce today.

04.11. Lord, Break Me

Lord, Break Me

Some years ago, in a missionary prayer meeting, I heard an earnest young believer pray, “Lord, break me!” The request jarred me. Up to that time in my life, I had never prayed that prayer. And I wasn’t sure I was ready to pray it even then. But those words, flowing hissing hot from the heart of that young disciple, awakened me to the tremendous need of brokenness in my own life. They created an awareness that this was a fantastically vital area in the spiritual realm. And now they have become the constant prayer of an aspiring heart:

LORD, BREAK ME!

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05.001. Old Testament Digest

Old Testament Digest Volume 1: Genesis - Deuteronomy

05.002. Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Introduction

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

05.003. Introduction

Introduction For convenience in study. Old Testament history is generally divided into ages or time-periods. One common treatment of these ages is as follows:

1. From Creation to the Fall.
2. From the Fall to the Flood.
3. From the Flood to the Tower of Babel.
4. From Babel to Abraham.
5. From Abraham to Moses.
6. From Moses to Joshua.
7. From Joshua to Samuel.
8. The United Kingdom.
9. The Divided Kingdom.
10. The Babylonian Captivity.
11. The Restoration from Captivity, 12. The Four Hundred Silent Years between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Another familiar division of the Old Testament is:

1. Historical: Genesis through Esther.
2. Wisdom and Poetical: Job through Song of Solomon.
3. Prophetical: Isaiah through Malachi. The books in the Historical section, with a few exceptions, follow each other chronologically in recording the events from creation to the return from Babylonian captivity. Nehemiah brings the reader to the close of the narrative, approximately 400 years before the birth of Christ. (The events in the book of Esther took place during the time of Ezra). The Wisdom and Poetry books belong to various periods of Old Testament history. Job, for example, belongs to the early part of Genesis, just before Abraham. The Psalms of David belong to 1 and 2 Samuel. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon relate to the time of Solomon, recorded in 1 Kings. The writing prophets ministered during the closing days of the kingdom, during the captivity, and after the return from captivity. Their historical background, therefore, is found in 2 Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah. For the most part, the Old Testament is concerned with God's chosen earthly people, Israel. The beginning of that people is found in Genesis 12:1-20. From there through Malachi, the Hebrew people hold the place of prominence, and other nations are important only as they have contact with the Israelites.

05.004. Genesis

Genesis

05.005. Outline Of Genesis

Outline Of Genesis I. Creation (Genesis 1:1-31, Genesis 2:1-25).

II. The Fall of Man (Genesis 3:1-24, Genesis 4:1-26, Genesis 5:1-32).

III. Noah and the-Flood (Genesis 6:1-22, Genesis 7:1-24, Genesis 8:1-22, Genesis 9:1-29, Genesis 10:1-32), IV. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-32).

V. Abraham (Genesis 12:1-20, Genesis 13:1-18, Genesis 14:1-24, Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 17:1-27, Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18, Genesis 21:1-34, Genesis 22:1-24, Genesis 23:1-20, Genesis 24:1-67, Genesis 25:1-34), A. Call (Genesis 12:1).

B. The Covenant (Genesis 12:2-3).

C. To Egypt and back (Genesis 12:10-20, Genesis 13:1-4),

D. Experiences with Lot and Abimelech (Genesis 13:5-8, Genesis 14:1-24; Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38, Genesis 20:1-18).

E. Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 16:1-16, Genesis 17:1-27; Genesis 21:1-34).

F. Offering of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-24).

G. Purchase of Cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:1-20).

H. A bride for Isaac (Genesis 24:1-67).

VI. Isaac (Genesis 25:19-34, Genesis 26:1-35, Genesis 27:1-46).

VII. Jacob (Genesis 28:1-22, Genesis 29:1-35, Genesis 30:1-43, Genesis 31:1-55, Genesis 32:1-32, Genesis 33:1-20, Genesis 34:1-31, Genesis 35:1-29, Genesis 36:1-43).

A. Blessed by Isaac (Genesis 28:1-9).

B. Sent to Haran—his vision and vow (Genesis 28:10-22).

C. The years spent working for Laban, including marriage to Leah and Rachel, and birth of the twelve sons (Genesis 29:1-35, Genesis 30:1-43).

D. Return to Canaan and reconciliation to Esau (Genesis 31:1-55, Genesis 32:1-32, Genesis 33:1-17).

E. Calamities and crises (Genesis 33:18-20, Genesis 34:1-31, Genesis 35:1-29, Genesis 36:1-43).

VIII. Joseph (Genesis 37:1-36, Genesis 38:1-30, Genesis 39:1-23, Genesis 40:1-23, Genesis 41:1-57, Genesis 42:1-38, Genesis 43:1-34, Genesis 44:1-34, Genesis 45:1-28, Genesis 46:1-34, Genesis 47:1-31, Genesis 48:1-22, Genesis 49:1-33, Genesis 50:1-26).

- A. Rejected by brethren and sold into Egypt (Genesis 37:1-36). (Parenthetical chapter on Judah's sin—Genesis 38:1-30) B. Promotion in Egypt and personal integrity (Genesis 39:1-23, Genesis 40:1-23).
- C. Famine brings his brethren to Egypt for food (Genesis 41:1-57, Genesis 42:1-38, Genesis 43:1-34, Genesis 44:1-34).
- D. Joseph's identity made known to his brethren and to his father, Jacob (Genesis 45:1-28, Genesis 46:1-34, Genesis 37:1-31).
- E. Joseph's sons blessed by Jacob (Genesis 48:1-22).
- F. Jacob's blessing of his own sons (Genesis 49:1-33).
- G. Death of Jacob, then later of Joseph (Genesis 50:1-26).

05.006. Chapter 1

Genesis 1:1-31

“In the beginning God... .” These first four words of the Bible form the foundation for faith. Believe these words, and you can believe all that follows in the Bible. Genesis provides the only authoritative account of creation, meaningful for people of all ages but exhaustible by no one. The divine record assumes the existence of God rather than seeking to prove it. The Bible has a special name for those who choose to deny .the fact of God—see Psalms 14:1; Psalms 53:1.

One of several interpretations of the Genesis account of creation, the creation-reconstruction view says that between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 a great catastrophe occurred, perhaps the fall of Satan. This caused-God’s original, perfect creation to become waste and empty (tohu wabohu). Since God didn’t create the earth waste and empty (see Isaiah 45:18), only a mighty cataclysm could explain the chaotic condition of Genesis 1:2. Proponents of this view point out that the word translated “was” (hayetha) could also be translated “had become.” Thus the earth “had become waste and empty.” The Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters, preparatory to the great creative and reconstructive acts to follow. The remaining verses describe the six days of creation and reconstruction which prepared the earth for human habitation. On the first day God commanded light to shine out of darkness and established the day-night cycle. This act is not to be confused with the establishment of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 the Apostle Paul draws a parallel between the original separation of light from darkness and the conversion of a sinner.

Prior to the second day, it seems that the earth was completely surrounded by a thick layer of water, perhaps in the form of a heavy vapor. On the second day God divided this layer, part covering the earth with water and part forming clouds, with the atmospheric layers (“firmament”) between. God called the firmament “heaven”—that is, the expanse of space immediately above the earth (not the stellar heavens, nor the third heaven, where God dwells). Genesis 1:20 makes it clear that the heaven here is the sphere where the birds fly.

Next the Lord caused the earth mass to appear out of the water that covered the face of the planet. Also on the third day He caused vegetation of all kinds to spring up in the earth.

It was not until the fourth day that the Lord set the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens as lightbearers and as means for establishing a calendar. The fifth day saw the waters stocked with fish and the earth stocked with bird-life and perhaps insects. On the sixth day God first created animals and reptiles. The law of reproduction is repeatedly given in the words “after its kind.” There are significant variations within “kinds” of biological life, but there is no passing from one kind to another. The crown of God’s work was the creation of man in His image and after His likeness. This means that man was placed on earth as God’s representative, and that He resembles God in certain ways. Just as God is a Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), so man is a tripartite being (spirit, soul, and body), like God, man has intellect, a moral nature, the power to

communicate with others, and an emotional nature that transcends instinct. There is no thought of physical likeness here. In contrast to animals, man is a worshiper, an articulate communicator, and a creator.

There is an intimation of the Trinity in Genesis 1:20 : “And God [Elohim, plural] said, “Let us [plural] make [singular] man in our image...” The Bible describes the origin of the sexes as a creative act of God. Evolution has never been able to explain how the sexes began. In Genesis 1:28, the word “replenish” does not mean to refill, as if there had been a previous race. It means to fill or to stock.

It is clear from Genesis 1:29-30 that animals were originally herbivorous and that man was vegetarian. Were the six days of creation literal 24-hour days, or were they geological ages, or were they days of “dramatic vision” during which the creation account was revealed to Moses? No scientific evidence has ever refuted the concept that they were literal solar days. The expression “the evening and the morning” points to 24-hour days. Everywhere else in the Old Testament these words mean normal days. Adam lived through the seventh day and died in his 930th year, so the seventh day could not have been a geological age. Wherever the word “day” is used with a number in the Old Testament (“first day,” etc.) it means a literal day. When God commanded Israel to rest on the Sabbath day, He based the command on the fact that He had rested on the seventh day, after six days of labor (Exodus 20:8-11). Consistent interpretation here requires the same meaning of the word “day.” A difficulty, however, is that the solar day as we know it may not have begun until the fourth day (Genesis 1:14-19). As far as the Bible is concerned, the creation of the heavens and the earth is undated. The creation of man is undated also. However, genealogies are given, and, even allowing for possible gaps in the genealogies, man could not have been on the earth for the millions of years demanded by evolutionists.

We learn from John 1:1; John 1:14, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2 that the Lord Jesus was the active Agent in creation. For the inexhaustible wonders of His creation, He is worthy of endless worship.

05.007. Chapter 2

Genesis 2:1-25

God rested from His creative activity on the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3). This is not the rest that follows weariness but the rest of satisfaction and completion of a job well done. Although God did not command man to keep the Sabbath at this time. He taught the principle of one day of rest in seven. The name LORD GOD (Jehovah Elohim) appears for the first time in verse 4, but only after the creation of man (Genesis 1:27). As Elohim, God is the Creator. As Jehovah, He is in covenant relation with man. Failing to see this, some Bible critics have concluded that these different names for God can only be explained by a change in authorship.

“These are the generations” (Genesis 2:4) refers to the beginnings described in Genesis 1:1-31. Genesis 2:5 should read, as in the NASB (New American Standard Bible), “Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted...” This verse describes conditions on the earth in Genesis 1:10, when the dry land appeared but before vegetation appeared. The earth was moistened by a mist rather than by rain. A fuller account of the creation of man is now given (Genesis 2:7). His body was formed from the dust of the ground, but only the impartation of the breath of God made him a living soul. Adam (“red” or “ground”) was named after the red earth from which he was made. The Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-14) was toward the east, i.e., from Palestine, the point of reference for Bible directions. It was located in the region of Mesopotamia, near the Hiddekel (Tigris) and Euphrates Rivers (Genesis 2:14). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil provided a test of man’s obedience. The only reason it was wrong to eat of that fruit was because God had said so. In different forms, that fruit is still with us today. The penalty for violating the commandment was death (Genesis 2:17)—instant spiritual death and progressive physical death. In the process of naming the animals and birds, Adam would have noticed that there were males and females. Each one had a mate that was similar to itself, yet different. This prepared Adam for a partner who would be suitable for himself. His bride was formed from a rib, taken from his side as he slept. So from Christ’s side, His Bride was secured as He shed His life’s blood in untold agony. It has been said that the woman was taken not from Adam’s head to dominate him, nor from his feet to be trodden down, but from under his arm to be protected, and from near his heart to be loved... Read Genesis 2:19 as in the New International Version, “Now the Lord God had formed ... all the beasts,” i.e., before He made man. With the words of Genesis 2:24 God instituted monogamous marriage. Like all divine institutions, it was established for man’s good and cannot be violated with impunity. The marriage bond illustrates the relationship that exists between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-32).

05.008. Chapter 3

Genesis 3:1-24 The serpent that appeared to Eve is later revealed to be none other than Satan himself (see Revelation 12:9). Those who seek to “demythologize” the Bible believe that this account of the fall is allegorical and not literal. They cite the talking serpent as proof. Can the story of the serpent’s deceiving Eve be accepted as factual? The Apostle Paul thought so (2 Corinthians 11:3). So did the Apostle John (Revelation 12:9; Revelation 20:2). Nor is this the only instance of a talking animal in Scripture. God gave a voice to Balaam’s donkey to restrain the madness of the prophet (Numbers 22:1-41), and the Apostle Peter accepted this as literal (2 Peter 2:16). These three apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write as they did. Thus to reject the account of the fall as literal is to reject the inspiration of Holy Scripture. There are allegories in the Bible, but this is not one of them.

Notice the steps that plunged the human race into sin. First Satan insinuated doubt about the Word of God: “Yea, hath God said?” (Genesis 3:1). He misrepresented God as forbidding Adam and Eve to eat of any tree (Genesis 3:1). Next, Eve said that they were not to eat or touch the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden (Genesis 3:3). But God had said nothing about touching the tree. Then Satan flatly contradicted God about the inevitability of judgment on those who disobeyed (Genesis 3:4), just as his followers still deny the facts of hell and eternal punishment. Satan misrepresented God as seeking to withhold from Adam and Eve something that would have been beneficial to them (Genesis 3:5). Eve yielded to the threefold temptation: the lust of the flesh (“good for food”), the lust of the eyes (“pleasant to the eyes”), and the pride of life (“a tree to be desired to make one wise”) (Genesis 3:6). In doing so, she acted independently of Adam, her head. She should have consulted him instead of usurping his authority. In the words “she took of the fruit thereof and did eat” lie the explanation of all the sickness, sorrow, suffering, fear, guilt, and death that have plagued the human race ever since that time. Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14), but Adam acted willfully and in deliberate rebellion against God (Genesis 3:6). The first result of sin was a sense of shame and fear (Genesis 3:7-11). The aprons of fig leaves speak of man’s attempt to save himself by a bloodless religion of good works (Genesis 3:7). When called to account by God, sinners excuse themselves. Adam said, “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me ...” as if blaming God (see Proverbs 19:5). Eve said, “The serpent ...” (Genesis 3:13). In love and mercy God searched after His fallen creatures with the question “Where art thou?” “This question proved two things—that man was lost and that God had come to seek. It proved man’s sin and God’s grace.”¹ God takes the initiative in salvation, demonstrating the very thing Satan got Eve to doubt—His love.

God cursed the serpent to degradation, disgrace, and defeat (Genesis 3:14). The fact that the serpent is cursed more than the cattle or other beasts of the field suggests that reptiles are primarily in view here rather than Satan. But Genesis 3:15 switches to the Devil himself. This verse is known as the protevangelion, meaning the first gospel. It predicts the perpetual hostility between Satan and the woman (representing all mankind), and between Satan’s seed (his agents) and the woman’s seed (the Messiah). The woman’s seed would crush the Devil’s head, a mortal wound

spelling utter defeat. This wound was administered at Calvary when the Savior decisively triumphed over the Devil. Satan, in turn, would bruise the Messiah's heel. The heel wound here speaks of suffering and even of physical death, but not of ultimate defeat. So Christ, suffered on the cross, and even died, but. He arose from the dead, victorious over sin, hell, and Satan. The fact that He is called the woman's seed may contain a suggestion of His virgin birth. Note the kindness of God in promising the Messiah before pronouncing sentence in the following verses.

Sin has inevitable consequences. The woman was sentenced to suffering in childbirth. And yet she would still be subject to her husband (Genesis 3:16 NASB). The man was sentenced to earn his livelihood from ground that was cursed with thorns and thistles. It would mean toil and sweat for him. Then at the end of life, he himself would return to dust (Genesis 3:17-19). It should be noted here that work itself is not a curse; it is more often a blessing. It is the sorrow, toil, frustration, perspiration, and weariness connected with work that are the curse.

Adam displayed faith in calling Eve the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20), since no baby had ever been born up to this time. Then coats of skin were provided by God through the death of an animal (Genesis 3:21). This pictures the robe of righteousness which is provided for guilty sinners through the shed blood of the Lamb of God, made available to us on the basis of faith.

There was a shade of truth in Satan's lie that Eve would become like God (Genesis 3:5). But she and Adam learned by the hard way of experience to discern between good and evil (Genesis 3:22). If they had then eaten of the tree of life, they would have lived forever in bodies subject to sickness, degeneration, and infirmity. Thus it was God's mercy that prevented them from returning to Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). Cherubim are celestial creatures whose function is to "vindicate the holiness of God against the presumptuous pride of fallen man."²

Adam and Eve had to decide whether God or Satan was lying. They decided that God was. "Without faith it is tin-possible to please God." Thus their names are missing from the Honor Roll of Faith in Hebrews 11:1-40.

05.009. Chapter 4

Genesis 4:1-26

Adam knew Eve in the sense that he had sexual relations with her (Genesis 4:1 NASB). When Cain was born, she acknowledged that this birth was only by the Lord's enablement. In naming him Cain ("acquisition"), Eve may have thought that she had given birth to the promised seed. The passing of time mentioned in verse 3a allows for a considerable increase in the world's population.

There must have been a time when Cain and Abel were instructed that sinful man can approach the holy God only on the ground of the blood of a substitutionary sacrifice. Cain rejected this revelation and came with a bloodless offering of fruits and vegetables. Abel believed the divine decree and offered slain animals, thus demonstrating his faith and his justification by God (Hebrews 11:4). Abel's offering points forward to the substitutionary death of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Because Cain's jealous anger was incipient murder, God spoke to him in loving warning. Genesis 4:7 may be understood in several ways;

If you do well [by repenting], you will be able to look up again in freedom from anger and guilt. If you don't do well [by continuing to hate Abel], sin is crouching at your door, ready to destroy you. His [Abel's] desire is for you (i.e., he will acknowledge your leadership) and you will rule over him [i.e., if you do well].

"If thou doest well [or, as the Septuagint reads it, 'If thou offer correctly... .'] shall thou not be accepted?" The well-doing had reference to the offering. Abel did well by hiding himself behind an acceptable sacrifice. Cain did badly by bringing an offering without blood, and all his after-conduct was but the legitimate result of this false worship.³ The RSV (Revised Standard Version) says, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

F. W. Grant says in his Numerical Bible, "...If you do not well, a sin-offering croucheth or lieth at the door."⁴ In other words, provision was made if he wanted it.

Cain's evil attitude of jealous rage was soon translated into evil action, the murder of his brother (Genesis 4:8). Though Abel is dead, he still witnesses to us that the life of faith is the life that counts (Hebrews 11:4). When the Lord's loving question was met by an unrepentant, insolent reply, He pronounced Cain's judgment—he would no longer be able to make a living from the soil, but would wander as a nomad in the desert (Genesis 4:9-12). Cain's whimpering complaint reveals remorse for the consequences of his sin rather than for its guilt (Genesis 4:13). But even then the Lord allayed the fugitive's fears for his life by putting a protective mark upon him and a curse on any- one who killed him (Genesis 4:14-15). Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, the saddest of all departures (Genesis 4:16).

Cain married his sister or other blood relative (Genesis 4:17). As mentioned, Genesis 4:3 allows time for a population increase, and Genesis 5:4 specifically states that Adam had sons and daughters. Marriage of close relatives was not forbidden then (nor was it genetically risky).

Genesis 4:17-24 list Cain's posterity, and a series of firsts: the first city, named Enoch (Genesis 4:17); the first case of polygamy (Genesis 4:19); the beginning of organized animal husbandry (Genesis 4:20); the beginning of the art of music (Genesis 4:21) and of metalcrafts (Genesis 4:22); the first song concerning violence and bloodshed (Genesis 4:23-24). In the song (see NASB), Lamech explains to his wives that he slew a young man in self-defense, but that because it wasn't premeditated, like Cain's murder of his brother, Lamech would be much more immune from reprisal.

Now in striking relief, the godly line of Seth is introduced (Genesis 4:25-26). It was through this line that the Messiah would eventually be born. When Enosh (meaning "frail" or "mortal") was born, men began to use the name Jehovah for God, or perhaps to call on the name of Jehovah in public worship.

05.010. Chapter 5

Genesis 5:1-32 This chapter has been called “The Tolling of the Death Bells” because of the oft-repeated expression “and he died.” It records the bloodline of the Messiah from Adam to Noah’s son, Shem (compare Luke 3:36-38).

Adam was created in the likeness of God (Genesis 5:1). Seth was born in the image of Adam (Genesis 5:3). In between, the Fall took place and the image of God in man became marred by sin. Genesis 5:5 records the physical fulfillment of what God said would happen in Genesis 2:17; the spiritual fulfillment took place the day Adam sinned. The Enoch and Lamech mentioned in this chapter should not be confused with those in Genesis 4:1-26. By faith Enoch walked with God for 300 years and pleased the Lord (Hebrews 11:5). It seems that the birth of his son had a sanctifying, ennobling influence on his life (Genesis 5:22 a). It is good to start well, but it is even better to continue steadfastly to the end. The word walk implies a steady, progressive relationship and not just a casual acquaintance. To walk with God is the business of a lifetime, and not just the performance of an hour.

Enoch was translated to heaven prior to the flood just as the church will be raptured to heaven before the tribulation begins.

Methuselah lived longer than any other man (969 years). If, as Williams says, the name Methuselah means “it shall be sent,”⁵ it may be a prophecy, because the flood came in the year of his death. Perhaps Lamech’s prediction when he named Noah looked forward to the comfort that would come to the world through Noah’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 5:29). Noah’s name means “rest.” As the years passed, man’s life expectancy decreased. Psalms 90:10 speaks of 70 years as normal.

05.011. Chapter 6

Genesis 6:1-22

There are two principal interpretations of Genesis 6:2. One is that the sons of God were angels who left their proper sphere (Jude 1:6) and intermarried with women on earth, a form of sexual disorder that was most hateful to God. Those who hold this view point out that the expression “sons of God” in Job 1:6; Job 2:1 means angels who had access to the presence of God. The passage in Jude 1:6-7 suggests that the angels who left their first estate were guilty of vile sexual behavior. Notice the words “even as Sodom and Gomorrah ...” at the beginning of Genesis 6:7, immediately after the description of the fallen angels. To the objection that angels are incapable of sexual relations, based on Matthew 22:30, it is pointed out that Jesus was speaking of angels in heaven when He said they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Angels appeared in human form to Abraham (Genesis 18:1-5), and it seems from the text that the two who went to Sodom had human parts and emotions. The other view is that the sons of God were the godly descendants of Seth, and the daughters of men were the wicked posterity of Cain. The argument is as follows: The preceding context deals with the descendants of Cain (Genesis 4:1-28) and the descendants of Seth (Genesis 5:1-32). Genesis 6:1-4 describes the intermarriage of these two lines. Angels are not found in the context. Genesis 6:5-6 speak of the wickedness of man. If it was the angels who sinned, why was the race of man to be destroyed? Godly men are called “sons of God,” though not in exactly the same Hebrew wording as in Genesis 6:2 (see Deuteronomy 14:1; Psalms 82:6; Hosea 1:10; Matthew 5:9).

God warned that His Spirit would not always strive with man, but that there would be a delay of 120 years before the judgment of the flood would occur (Genesis 6:3). God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but there is a limit.

“The Nephilim are considered by many as giant demigods, the unnatural offspring of ‘the daughters of men’ (mortal women) in cohabitation with ‘the sons of God’ (angels). This utterly unnatural union, violating God’s created orders of being, was such a shocking abnormality as to necessitate the worldwide judgment of the Flood.”⁶

God’s repentance (Genesis 6:6) does not indicate an arbitrary change of mind, though it seems that way to man. Rather, it indicates a different attitude on God’s part in response to some change in man’s behavior. Because He is holy, He must react against sin.

Noah found grace in God’s eyes and was forewarned to build an ark. The measurements are given in cubits (1 cubit = 18 inches). Thus the ark was 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It had three decks. The window in verse 16 was literally “a place of light,” probably an opening for light and air which extended the full length of the ark.

Noah was saved by grace (Genesis 6:8), an act of divine sovereignty. His response was to do all that the Lord had commanded (Genesis 6:22), an act of human responsibility. Noah built the ark to the saving of his family, but it was God who shut and sealed the door. Divine sovereignty and

human responsibility are not mutually exclusive, but are complementary.

Noah (Genesis 6:9) and Enoch (Genesis 5:22) are the only men in Scripture who are said to have walked with God. If Enoch is a symbol of the church raptured to heaven, Noah symbolizes the faithful Jewish remnant preserved through the tribulation to live on the millennial earth.

Genesis 6:18 is the first mention of covenant in the Bible. Scofield lists eight covenants: Edenic (Genesis 2:16); Adamic (Genesis 3:15); Noahic (Genesis 9:16); Abrahamic (Genesis 12:2); Mosaic (Exodus 19:5); Palestinian (Deuteronomy 30:3); Davidic (2 Samuel 7:16); and the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8). A pair of every living creature was to be brought into the ark as well as food. Critics claim that the ark was not big enough to hold all the species of animals and enough food for one year and 17 days. But it is likely that the ark contained only the basic kinds of animal and bird life, and that many variations have resulted since then. The ark was more than large enough for this.

05.012. Chapter 7

Genesis 7:1-24 The word “come” appears for the first line in Genesis 7:1—a gracious gospel invitation. No reason is given why Noah was commanded to take seven pairs of clean animals into the ark, but only one pair of unclean. Perhaps it was for food and in anticipation of the clean animals being needed for sacrifice (see Genesis 8:20). The ark was filled with its inhabitants for seven days before the rain began and the underground reserves of water gushed out. The torrent continued for 40 days and 40 nights; 40 is the number of probation or testing in the Bible. Was this a local flood, as some allege? Consider the following! “All the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered” (Genesis 7:19 NASB). God need not have told Noah to build an ark equivalent to 1 1/2 football fields in length and 800 railroad cars in volume to escape a local flood. He could easily have moved eight people and the animals to a different location. Traditions of a universal flood have come from all parts of the world. The mountains of Ararat range up to 17,000 feet. The flood was 15 cubits higher (Genesis 7:19-20). By what sort of miracle was this water kept in a localized area? In Genesis 9:15 God promised that the water would never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. There have been many local floods since then, but never a universal flood. If the flood was local, then God’s promise has been broken—an impossible conclusion. Peter uses the destruction of the world by water as a symbol of a still future destruction of the earth by fire (2 Peter 3:6). The ark is a picture of Christ. The wafers depict God’s judgment. The Lord Jesus went under the waters of divine wrath at Calvary. Those who ate in Christ are saved. Those who are outside are doomed.

05.013. Chapter 8

Genesis 8:1-22 The chronology of the flood is as follows:

(a) 7 days—from the time Noah entered the ark until the flood began (Genesis 7:10) (b) 40 days and nights—duration of the rain (Genesis 7:12).

(c) 150 days—from the time the rain began until the waters abated (Genesis 8:3) and the ark rested on Mount Ararat (compare Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 8:4).

(d) 224 days—from the beginning of the flood until the mountaintops appeared (compare Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 8:5).

(e) 40 days—from the time the mountaintops were seen until Noah sent out the raven (Genesis 8:6).

(f) 7 days—from the sending of the raven to the first sending forth of the dove (Genesis 8:6-10; Genesis 8:10 NASB, “yet another seven days”).

(g) 7 more days—until the dove was sent forth a second time (Genesis 8:10).

(h) 7 more days—until the final sending forth of the dove.

(i) 314 days—from the beginning of the flood until the covering was removed from the ark (compare Genesis 7:14 and Genesis 8:13).

(j) 371 days—from the beginning of the flood until the earth was dried (compare Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 8:14). At this time, Noah was commanded to go forth from the ark (Genesis 8:16) The unclean raven (Genesis 8:7) and the clean dove (Genesis 8:8) picture the believer’s old and new natures. The old nature loves to feed on garbage and carrion whereas the new nature cannot find satisfaction in a scene of death and judgment. It finds no rest until it sets its feet on resurrection ground.

Noah responded to God’s saving grace by building an altar (Genesis 8:20). Those of us who have been saved from the wrath to come should likewise bring to God our heartfelt worship, it is as acceptable and pleasing today as it was in Noah’s day (Genesis 8:21). The Lord made a covenant that He would never again curse the ground or destroy every living creature, as He had done; also, He would provide regular seasons as long as the earth endured.

05.014. Chapter 9

Genesis 9:1-29

Genesis 9:3 suggests that men were now permitted to eat meat for the first time. Eating of blood was forbidden, however, because the blood is the life of the flesh, and the life belongs to God. The institution of capital punishment (Genesis 9:8) presupposes the establishment of governmental authority. It would be chaos if anyone and everyone avenged a murder. Only duly appointed governments may do so. The New Testament perpetuates capital punishment, when it says concerning the government, "... it does not bear the sword for nothing" (Romans 13:4 NASB). The rainbow was given as a pledge that God would never again destroy the earth with a flood (Genesis 9:8-17). In spite of God's grace to Noah, he sinned by becoming drunk and then lying nude in his tent. When Ham saw him and reported the matter to his brothers, they hid their father's shame without looking on his naked body. When he awoke, Noah pronounced a curse on Canaan. The question arises, "Why did the curse fall on Canaan instead of Ham?" One possible explanation is that the evil tendency which was manifested in Ham was even more pronounced in Canaan. The curse was thus a prophecy of his immoral conduct and its fitting punishment. Another explanation is that Canaan himself committed some vulgar act against his grandfather, and that Noah later became aware of it. Noah "knew what his youngest son had done to him" (Genesis 9:24 NASB). It may be that Genesis 9:24 refers to Canaan as Noah's youngest grandson, rather than to Ham as his youngest son. In the Bible, son often means grandson or other descendant. In this event, Canaan was not cursed for his father's sin, but for his own.

Canaan was cursed to serve Shem and Japheth (Genesis 9:26-27). The Canaanites' servitude to the Israelites may be seen in Joshua 9:23 and Judges 1:28. This passage has been used to suggest the slavery of the black people, but there is no support for this view. Canaan was the ancestor of the Canaanites, who dwelt in the Holy Land before Israel arrived. There is no evidence that they were black people. Shem and Japheth were blessed with dominion. Genesis 9:27 may suggest Japheth's sharing in spiritual blessings through Shem's descendants, the Israelites.

There is a dispute as to whether Shem or Japheth was the eldest son of Noah. Genesis 10:21 may read "Shem ... the brother of Japheth the elder" (KJV) or "Shem ... the older brother of Japheth" (NASB). The latter is the preferred reading. Shem appears first in the genealogies of Genesis 5:32 and 1 Chronicles 1:4.

05.015. Chapter 10

Genesis 10:1-32 Shem, Ham, and Japheth became the fathers of the nations.

Shem: The Semitic peoples—Jews, Arabs, Babylonians, Assyrians, Arameans, Phoenicians.

Ham: The Hamitic peoples—Ethiopians, Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, possibly the African and Oriental peoples.

Japheth: The Japhetic peoples—the Medes, Greeks, Cypriots, etc. Probably the Caucasian people of Europe and of northern Asia. The order in this chapter is Japheth (Genesis 10:2-5), Ham (Genesis 10:6-20), and Shem (Genesis 10:21-31). The Spirit of God is going to center on Sheol and his descendants during the rest of the Old Testament. The different tongues of Genesis 10:5 probably look forward to the time after the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Notice three references in this chapter to the division of the people. Genesis 10:5 describes the division of the Japhetic tribes into their different areas. Genesis 10:25 tells us that the division of the earth (at Babel) took place in the days of Peleg. Genesis 10:12 serves as an introduction to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-32, when the families of the sons of Noah were divided into different nations with different languages.

Nimrod (Genesis 10:8-10) means “rebel.” He appears as the first of the “mighty ones in the earth” after the flood (Genesis 10:8) and as the first to establish a kingdom (Genesis 10:10). He built Babel (Babylon) in rebellion against God, and also Nineveh in Assyria (see Genesis 10:11 NASB), another inveterate enemy of God’s people. As already mentioned, Genesis 10:21 lists Shem as the older brother of Japheth (see NASB).

It is impossible to identify with certainty the places where the various people settled, but the following will prove helpful in later studies.

Tarshish (Genesis 10:4)—Spain Canaan (Genesis 10:6)—Palestine Kittim (Genesis 10:4)—Cyprus Asshur (Genesis 10:11)—Assyria Cush (Genesis 10:6)—Ethiopia Elam (Genesis 10:22)—Persia Mizraim (Genesis 10:6)—Egypt Aram (Genesis 10:22)—Syria and Mesopotamia Put or Phut (Genesis 10:6)—Libya

05.016. Chapter 11

Genesis 11:1-32

Instead of dispersing over the earth, as God intended, men built a city and a tower in Shinar (Babylon). They said, "... let us build us a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). So it was a policy of pride (to make a name for themselves) and defiance (to avoid being scattered). To us the tower may also picture fallen man's ceaseless effort to reach heaven by his own works instead of receiving salvation as a free gift of grace.

God judged the people by confounding their language. This was the beginning of the many different languages which we have in the world today. Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11) was the reverse of Babel in the sense that every man heard the wonderful works of God in his own language.

Genesis 11:10-32 trace the line of Shem to Abram. Thus the historical record narrows from the human race to one branch of that race (the Semites) and then to one man (Abram), who becomes the head of the Hebrew nation. The rest of the Old Testament is largely a history of this nation.

Eber (Genesis 11:16-17) may be the name from which the word Hebrew comes. Hebrew means "to pass over" and may suggest crossing over the River Euphrates from Mesopotamia to Canaan.

Abram was a mighty man of faith and one of the most important men in history. Three world religions venerate him. He is mentioned in sixteen books of the Old Testament and eleven books of the New Testament. His name means "exalted father" or, as Abraham, "father of a great multitude."

There is a mathematical problem involving the ages of Terah and Abram, and especially concerning Abram's age when he left Haran. In Genesis 11:26 we read that Terah lived 70 years and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Abram was 75 when he left Haran (Genesis 12:4). But Acts 7:4 says that Abram left Haran after his father died, and Genesis 11:32 says that Terah died when he was 205. So Abram must have been 205 minus 70 or 135 when he left Haran, and not 75 (Genesis 12:4).

There are several possible answers to the dilemma. First, when we read "Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran," we do not know which son was born first, or how many years there were between the sons. Abram could have been the youngest, born 60 years after the first (but named first because he was the progenitor of the Messiah). "Another [possible solution] is to follow the Samaritan text, which gives Terah's age as 145 at death."⁷

Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:31), in Mesopotamia, was a center of pagan idolatry. Terah and his family traveled northwest to Haran, en route to the land of Canaan.

05.017. Chapter 12

Genesis 12:1-20 The call of God came to Abram when he was still in Ur (compare Genesis 12:1 with Acts 7:1-2). Abram was called to leave his country, his relatives, and his father's house, and to embark on a life of pilgrimage (Hebrews 11:9). God made a marvelous covenant with him which included the following significant promises: a land (Genesis 12:1)—that is, the land of Canaan; a great nation (Genesis 12:2)—namely, the Jewish people; material and spiritual prosperity for Abram and his seed (Genesis 12:2); a great name for Abram and his posterity (Genesis 12:2); they would be a channel of blessing to others (Genesis 12:2); friends of Israel would be blessed and anti-Semites would be cursed (Genesis 12:3); all families of the earth would be blessed in Abram (Genesis 12:3), pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be a descendant of Abram. This covenant was renewed and enlarged in Genesis 13:14-17; Genesis 15:4-6; Genesis 17:10-14; and Genesis 22:15-18.

After what have been called “the wasted years in Haran,” Abram moved to Canaan with his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, other relatives, and possessions. They came first to Sichem (Shechem), where Abram built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 12:6-7). The presence of hostile Canaanites (v. 6) was no obstacle to a man who was walking by faith. Abram next relocated between Bethel (“house of God”) and Ai (Genesis 12:8). True to form, he erected a tent for himself and an altar for Jehovah. This says a great deal about the priorities of this man of God. Verse 9 finds him moving south to the Negev. But faith has its lapses. During a time of serious famine, Abram left the place of God's choosing and fled to Egypt, a symbol of the world (Genesis 12:10). This move bred trouble. Abram became obsessed with the fear that the Pharaoh might kill him in order to seize beautiful Sarai for his harem (Genesis 12:11-12). So Abram prevailed on Sarai to lie by saying that she was his sister (Genesis 12:13). Actually she was his half-sister (Genesis 20:12), but it was still a lie, with deception as its motive. The ruse worked for Abram (he was rewarded handsomely) but it worked against Sarai (she had to join the Pharaoh's harem) (Genesis 12:15-16). And it worked against the Pharaoh (he and his household contacted plagues) (Genesis 12:17). The latter acted more

righteously than Abram when he learned of the deception. After rebuking Abram, he sent him back to Canaan (Genesis 12:18-20). This incident reminds us that we should not wage a spiritual warfare with carnal weapons, that the end does not justify the means, and that we can't sin and get away with it.

God did not forsake Abram, but He did allow the sin to work itself out. Abram was publicly humbled by the Pharaoh and deported in disgrace. The word “Pharaoh” was not a proper name but a title, such as king, emperor, president, etc.

05.018. Chapter 13

Genesis 13:1-18

Underlying Abram's return to Bethel from Egypt (Genesis 13:1-4) was a return to fellowship with God. "Back to Bethel" is the rallying cry for all who have wandered from the Lord. The herdsmen of Lot and Abram quarreled over pastureland for their flocks. In true courtesy, kindness, and unselfishness, Abram offered Lot, his choice of all the land. Lot chose the lush pastures of the Jordan Valley, adjacent to the sin-cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Though a true believer (2 Peter 2:7-8), Lot was a world-borderer. As someone has said, he got grass for his cattle while Abram got grace for his children (Genesis 13:15, Genesis 13:18). The fact that the men of Sodom "were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly" didn't restrain Lot in his choice. Notice the steps in his plunge into worldliness: He [his men] strove (Genesis 13:7); he beheld (Genesis 13:10); he chose (Genesis 13:11); he pitched his tent toward (Genesis 13:12); he dwelt—away from the place where God's priest was (Genesis 14:12); he sat in the gate (Genesis 19:1). Soon Lot was a local official.

Abram renounced the choicest pastureland, but God gave all the land of Canaan to him and to his seed forever. In addition, the Lord promised him a numberless posterity. After settling in Hebron, Abram built his third altar to the Lord—always an altar for God, but never a house for himself!

05.019. Chapter 14

Genesis 14:1-24

Thirteen years before the main events of this chapter, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam (Persia), had conquered various kings in the plains adjacent to the Dead Sea. In the thirteenth year, the five captive kings rebelled against Chedorlaomer. So he allied himself with three other kings from the region of Babylon, marched south along the eastern side of the Dead Sea, then north on the western side to Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain. The battle took place in the vale of Siddim, which was full of tar pits. The invaders defeated the rebels and marched north with their booty and captives—including Lot, Abram’s backslidden nephew (Genesis 14:1-12). When Abram received the news, he assembled a fighting force of 318 men and pursued the victors to Dan, in the north. He finally defeated them near Damascus, in Syria, and rescued Lot and all the spoils. Backsliders bring not only misery on themselves but trouble on others. Here Abram delivered Lot by the sword (Genesis 14:14-16). Later he delivers him through intercessory prayer (Genesis 18:1-33, Genesis 19:1-38). As Abram was returning home, the king of Sodom went out to meet him, just as Satan often tempts the believer after a great spiritual victory. But Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God, was on hand with bread and wine to strengthen Abram. We cannot read this first mention of bread and wine without thinking of these symbols of our Savior’s passion. When we consider the price He paid to save us from sin, we are strengthened to resist every sinful temptation.

Names in Scripture have meanings. Melchizedek means “king of righteousness” and Salem (short for Jerusalem) means “peace.” So he was king of righteousness and king of peace. He is a symbol of Christ, true King of righteousness and peace, and our Great High Priest. When it says in Hebrews 7:3 that Melchizedek was without father or mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, this is to be understood only in connection with his priesthood. Most priests inherited their office and served for a limited tenure. But the priesthood of Melchizedek was unique in that, as far as the record is concerned, it wasn’t passed on to him from his parents, and it did not have a beginning or an end. Christ’s priesthood is “after the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek blessed Abram, and Abram in turn paid tithes of all his captured prizes to this priest of God. In Hebrews 7:1-28 we learn that there was a deep spiritual significance to these actions. Because Abram was the progenitor of Aaron, he is seen as representing the Aaronic priesthood. The fact that Melchizedek blessed Abram means that Melchizedek’s priesthood is greater than Aaron’s, because the one who blesses is superior to the one who is blessed. The fact that Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek is seen as a picture of the Aaronic priesthood acknowledging in this way the superiority of Melchizedek’s priesthood, because the lesser pays tithes to the greater. The king of Sodom said, in effect, “Give rue the people; you take the material things.” So Satan still tempts us to be occupied with toys of dust while people around us are perishing, Abram replied that he wouldn’t take a thread or a shoelace.

05.020. Chapter 15

Genesis 15:1-21

Genesis 15:1 is closely linked with the last three verses of the previous chapter. Because the patriarch refused the rewards of the King of Sodom, Jehovah said, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward," thus making Abram fabulously wealthy. Being childless, Abram and Sarai feared that their servant, Eliezer, would be their heir, since that was the law at that time (Genesis 15:2-3). But God promised them a son and a posterity as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:4-5). Humanly speaking this was impossible, since Sarai had passed the time when she could bear a child. But Abram believed God's promise, and God declared him to be righteous (Genesis 15:6). The truth of justification by faith enunciated here is repeated in Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:8, and James 2:23. In Genesis 13:18 God had promised seed as numerous as the dust, and here in Genesis 15:5 as numerous as the stars. The dust pictures Abram's natural posterity—those who are Jews by birth. The stars depict his spiritual seed—those who are justified by faith (see Galatians 3:7). To confirm the promise of a seed (Genesis 15:1-6) and of a land (Genesis 15:7-8, Genesis 15:18-21), God acted out a strange and significant symbolism (Genesis 15:9-21). "According to the ancient Eastern manner of making a covenant, both the contracting parties passed through the divided pieces of the slain animals, thus symbolically attesting that they pledged their very lives to the fulfillment of the engagement they made (see Jeremiah 34:18-19). Now in Genesis 15:1-21, God alone, whose presence was symbolized by the smoking furnace and lamp of fire, passed through the midst of the pieces of the slain animals, while Abram was simply a spectator of this wonderful exhibition of God's free grace."⁸ This signified that it was an unconditional covenant, dependent for fulfillment on God alone.

According to another view of this passage, the sacrificial pieces represent the nation of Israel (Genesis 15:9-10). The fowls speak of the Gentile nations (Genesis 15:11). The land, of course, is Egypt (Genesis 15:13). Israel would be delivered from Egyptian bondage and return to Canaan in the fourth generation (Genesis 15:16). The smoking furnace and the burning lamp describe the national destiny of Israel—suffering and witness-bearing (Genesis 15:17).

Israel's deliverance would not come until the iniquity of the Amorites was full. These pagan inhabitants of Canaan must eventually be exterminated. But God often allows evil to run its course, sometimes to the seeming detriment of His people, before He judges it. He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish—even the depraved Amorites (2 Peter 3:9). He also allows evil to come to fruition so that the awful consequences of wickedness can be manifested to all. Thus His wrath is demonstrated to be completely righteous.

Genesis 15:13-14 pose a chronological problem. They predict that Abram's people would be in harsh servitude in a foreign land for 400 years, and that they would leave at the end of that time, carrying great wealth with them. In Acts 7:6 this figure of 400 years is repeated. In Exodus 12:40-41 we read that the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, were sojourners for 430 years, to the very day.

Then in Galatians 3:17 Paul says that the period from the confirming of the Abrahamic Covenant until the giving of the Law was 430 years.

How can these figures be reconciled? The 400 years mentioned in Genesis 15:13-14 and in Acts 7:6 refer to the time of Israel's harsh affliction in Egypt. Jacob and his family were not in bondage when they first came to Egypt. On the contrary, they were treated quite royally. The 430 years in Exodus 12:40-41 refer to the total time the people of Israel spent in Egypt—to the very day. This is an exact figure. The 430 years in Galatians 3:17 cover approximately the same period as Exodus 12:40-41. They are reckoned from the time that God confirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob, just as Jacob was preparing to enter Egypt (Genesis 46:1-4), and they extend to the giving of the Law, about three months after the Exodus. The four generations of Genesis 15:16 can be seen in Exodus 6:18-20 : Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses.

Israel has not yet occupied the land promised in Genesis 15:18-21. Solomon had dominion over it (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Kings 4:24), as over vassal states, but his people did not occupy it. The covenant will be fulfilled when Christ returns to reign. Nothing can stop its fulfillment. What God has promised is as sure as if it had already occurred! The river of Egypt (Genesis 15:18) is generally believed to be a small stream south of Gaza known as Wadi el Arish, and not the Nile.

05.021. Chapter 16

Genesis 16:1-16 The restlessness of the sin nature is seen here. Instead of waiting on God, Sarai persuaded Abram to obtain a child by her maid, Hagar, who was probably acquired during the ill-fated sojourn in Egypt (Genesis 16:1-2). God is faithful in recording the marital irregularities of His people, even if He never approved them. When Hagar became pregnant, she looked clown in disdain on her mistress (Genesis 16:4). Sarai responded by blaming Abram, then driving Hagar out of the house (Genesis 16:5-6). While some of the behavior in this section may have been culturally acceptable then, it is certainly irregular from a Christian standpoint.

While Hagar was in the desert at Shur, on the way to Egypt, the angel of the Lord came to her (Genesis 16:7). This was the Lord Jesus in one of His preincarnate appearances (known as a theophany). He counseled her to return and submit to Sarai, and promised that her son would become head of a great nation. That promise, of course, is fulfilled in the Arab people. The words “return and submit” have marked great turning points in the lives of many who have had dealings with God.

Hagar’s exclamation in Genesis 16:13 might be paraphrased, “Thou art a God who may be seen,” for she said, “Have I really looked on God and remained alive after doing so?” She named the well Beer-lahai-roi, which means literally “Well of continuing to live after seeing God.”⁹

Abram was 86 when Ishmael was born to Hagar (Genesis 16:15-16), The name “Ishmael” means “God hears.” We should remember throughout this narrative that Hagar represents law whereas Sarai represents grace (see Galatians 4:1-31).

05.022. Chapter 17

Genesis 17:1-27

God's words to Abram in Genesis 17:1 may have been a veiled way of saying that he should stop trying to work things out in his own strength and let God work for him. Immediately afterward God renewed His covenant and changed the patriarch's name from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") (Genesis 17:2-8). Circumcision was then instituted as a sign of the covenant. This surgical operation, performed on the male child, was a physical mark that the person belonged to God's chosen earthly people. Although it was already practiced in the Middle East at this time, it took on new meaning for Abraham and his family. Every male in Abraham's house was circumcised, and thereafter every male baby was to be circumcised when he was eight days old or else be cut off from his people—that is, put away from the congregation of Israel (Genesis 17:9-14). The expression "cut off" sometimes means to put to death, as in Exodus 31:14-15. In other places, as here, it seems to mean to ban or ostracize. The Apostle Paul is careful to point out that Abraham was justified (Genesis 15:8) before he was circumcised. His circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had" (Romans 4:11). Believers today are not sealed with a physical mark; they receive the Holy Spirit as a seal at the time of their conversion (Ephesians 4:30).

God changed Sarai's name to Sarah ("princess") and promised Abraham that his 90-year-old wife would have a son (Genesis 17:15-16). The patriarch laughed, but in joyful wonder, not in unbelief (Genesis 17:17). His faith did not waver (Romans 4:18-21). When Abraham pled that Ishmael might have favor before God, he was told that the covenant would be fulfilled through his son, Isaac. However, Ishmael would be fruitful, would multiply, and would become a great nation (Genesis 17:18-22). Isaac was a symbol of Christ, through whom the covenant receives its ultimate fulfillment.

Notice the promptness of Abraham's obedience—"In the same day" (Genesis 17:26).

05.023. Chapter 18

Genesis 18:1-33

Shortly after the events of the preceding chapter, three men appeared to Abraham. Actually two of them were angels and the other was the Lord Himself. With typical Middle Eastern hospitality, Abraham and Sarah entertained the angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2) and One who was greater than angels (Genesis 18:1-8). When Sarah overheard the Lord say that she would have a child within a year, her laugh betrayed her unbelief. She was rebuked with the searching question, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” But the promise was repeated in spite of her doubting (Genesis 18:9-15). Hebrews 11:11 indicates that Sarah was basically a woman of faith in spite of this momentary lapse.

After the Lord revealed to Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom, and while the two angels were walking toward that city, Abraham’s great intercessory countdown began—50, 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally 10. Even for 10 righteous people the Lord would not destroy Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33)! Abraham’s prayer is a wonderful example of effectual intercession. It was based on the character of God (Genesis 18:25) and evidenced that boldness, yet deep humility which only an intimate knowledge of God can give. Only when Abraham stopped pleading did the Lord close the matter and depart (Genesis 18:33 NASB). There are many mysteries in life for which the truth of Genesis 18:25 is the only satisfying answer.

05.024. Chapter 19

Genesis 19:1-38 The name of Sodom has become synonymous with the sin of homosexuality or sodomy. But sexual perversion was not the only cause of the city's fall. In Ezekiel 18:49, 50, the Lord describes the sin of Sodom as "arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease" (NASB).

Lot received the two angels and insisted that they spend the night in his home, knowing too well the danger that would face them otherwise. Even then the men of Sodom sought to commit homosexual rape against these heavenly visitors. In a desperate effort to save his guests, Lot shamelessly offered his two daughters. Only a miracle saved the day; the angels smote the Sodomites with a temporary, confusing blindness (Genesis 19:1-11). The angels insisted that Lot and his family leave the city. But when he tried to persuade his sons-in-law (or perhaps prospective sons-in-law—see RSV), they thought he was mocking. His backslidden life nullified his testimony when the crisis came. In the morning the angels escorted Lot, his wife, and daughters out of Sodom. Even then Lot temporized, preferring to stay in Zoar, one of the satellite sin cities (Genesis 19:12-25). Not even 10 righteous men were found in the city of Sodom, so God destroyed it. But Abraham's prayer was not unanswered, for "God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow" (Genesis 19:29).

Though Lot's wife left the city, her heart was still in it, and she fell under the judgment of God (Genesis 19:26). In the words "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32), Christ held her up as a warning to all who trifle with His offer of salvation.

Leaving Zoar, Lot fled to a mountain cave. There his daughters made him drunk and enticed him to commit incest with them. The older daughter subsequently bore a son named Moab, and the younger a son, Ben-ammi. Thus began the Moabites and Ammonites, who became recurring thorns in Israel's side.

We know from 2 Peter 2:7-8 that Lot was a just man, but because of his worldliness he lost his testimony (Genesis 19:14), his wife (Genesis 19:26), his communion (there was none in Sodom), his property (he went in rich but came out poor), his character (Genesis 19:35), and nearly his life (Genesis 19:22). The depraved behavior of his daughters shows that they had been influenced by Sodom's vile standards (Genesis 19:30-38).

05.025. Chapter 20

Genesis 20:1-18

It seems incredible to us that Abraham would again try to pass off Sarah as his sister within 20 years of the same blunder with Pharaoh—incredible, that is, until we remember our own perpetual proneness to sin. The incident with Abimelech in Gerar is almost a replay of Abraham’s duplicity in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-17). God intervened to work out His purposes in the birth of Isaac, which might otherwise have been frustrated. He is more than just a spectator on the sidelines of history. He can overrule the evil of His people, even through the lives of the unregenerate. The pagan Abimelech acted more righteously in this incident than Abraham, the “friend of God.” (The word “Abimelech” is a title, and not a proper name.) It is shameful when a believer has to be justly rebuked by a man of the world! “When a half-truth is presented as the whole truth, it is an untruth” (Genesis 20:12). Abraham even tried to shift some of the blame onto God for making him wander in the first place (Genesis 20:13). He would have been wiser to humbly acknowledge his guilt. Nevertheless, he was still God’s man. And so the Lord sent Abimelech to him so that Abraham would pray that his household be healed of its barrenness (Genesis 20:7, Genesis 20:17-18). The expression “a covering of the eyes” means a gift given for the purpose of appeasing. Thus Genesis 20:16 b might read, “It is given to you as a payment in satisfaction as evidence to all that are with you and to all men that the wrong has been righted.”

05.026. Chapter 21

Genesis 21:1-34 When the promised son was born to Abraham and Sarah, the ecstatic parents named him Isaac (“laughter”), as commanded by God (Genesis 17:19, Genesis 17:21). This expressed their own delight and the delight of all who would hear the news (Genesis 21:1-3). Isaac was probably from 2 to 5 years old when he was weaned. Ishmael would have been between 13 and 17. When Sarah saw Ishmael mocking Isaac at the weaning party, she ordered Abraham to cast out Hagar and her son (Genesis 21:8-10). Paul interprets this action as evidence that law persecutes grace, that law and grace cannot be mixed, and that spiritual blessings cannot be obtained on the legal principle (Galatians 4:29).

Abraham was grieved to lose Hagar and Ishmael, but God consoled him with the promise that Ishmael would become the father of a great nation. And yet the Lord made it clear that Isaac was the promised son through whom the covenant would be carried out (Genesis 21:11-12). When Hagar and Ishmael almost perished from thirst in the desert south of Canaan, God caused them to find a well, and they were spared (Genesis 21:14-21). Ishmael was in his teens at this time; therefore, Genesis 21:15 probably means that Hagar pushed him under a bush in his weakness. Ishmael’s name, “God hears,” is found twice in Genesis 21:17—“God heard” and “God hath heard.” The Abimelech in Genesis 21:22 is not necessarily the same one as in Genesis 20:1-18, This chieftain’s servants had taken a well of water from Abraham’s men. When Abimelech and Abraham made a treaty of friendship, the patriarch told Abimelech about the well that had been seized. The result was a covenant granting the well to Abraham. He promptly named it Beersheba (“well of the oath”). The place later became a city, marking the southernmost boundary of the land (Genesis 21:22-32). Abraham planted a tamarisk tree as a memorial (Genesis 21:33).

05.027. Chapter 22

Genesis 22:1-24

Perhaps no scene in the Bible except Calvary itself is more poignant than this one, and none gives a clearer foreshadowing of the death of God's only, well-beloved Son on the Cross. The supreme test of Abraham's faith came when God ordered him to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22:1-2). Actually God had no intention of allowing Abraham to go through with it; He has always been opposed to human sacrifice. Moriah is the mountain range where Jerusalem is situated (2 Chronicles 3:1) and also where Calvary stood. God's words, "thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest" (Genesis 22:2), must have pierced Abraham's heart like ever-deepening wounds. Isaac was Abraham's only son in the sense that he was the only son of promise—the unique son, the son of miraculous birth. The first occurrence of a word in the Bible often sets the pattern for its usage throughout Scripture. "Love" (Genesis 22:2) and "worship" (Genesis 22:5) are first found here. Abraham's love for his son is a faint picture of God's love for the Lord Jesus. The sacrifice of Isaac was a picture of the greatest act of worship—the Savior's self-sacrifice to accomplish the will of God.

"Abraham, Abraham" (Genesis 22:11) is the first of ten name duplications found in the Bible. Seven are spoken by God to man (Genesis 22:11; Genesis 46:2; Exodus 3:4; 1 Samuel 3:10; Luke 10:41; Luke 22:31; Acts 9:4). The other three are Matthew 7:21-22; Matthew 23:37; Mark 15:34. They introduce matters of special importance. To offer Isaac was surely the supreme test of Abraham's faith. God had promised to give Abraham a numberless posterity through his son. Isaac could have been as much as 25 at this time, and he was unmarried. If Abraham slew him, how could the promise be fulfilled? According to Hebrews 11:19, Abraham believed that even if he slew his son, God would raise him from the dead. This faith was remarkable because there was no recorded case of resurrection up to this time in the world's history. Notice his faith also in Genesis 22:5 : "I and the lad will go yonder and worship and [we will] come again to you." Abraham was first justified by faith (Genesis 15:6), then justified (vindicated) by works here (see James 2:21). His faith was the means of his salvation, while his works were the proof of the reality of his faith. When Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb?" his father replied, "God will provide [for] Himself a lamb," This promise was not fulfilled by the ram of verse 13 (a ram is not a lamb), but by the Lamb of John 1:29.

There are two outstanding symbols of Christ in this chapter. Isaac is the first: an only son, loved by his father, willing to do his father's will, received back from the dead in a figure. The ram is the second: an innocent victim died as a substitute for another, its blood was shed, and it was a burnt offering wholly consumed for God. Someone has said that, in providing the ram as a substitute for Isaac. "God spared Abraham's heart a pang He would not spare His own." The angel of the Lord in Genesis 22:11 and Genesis 22:15, as in all the Old Testament, is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Abraham named the place Jehovah-jireh, which means "the Lord sees." then resultantly "the Lord will provide" (Genesis 22:14). This is one of the seven compound names for God in the Old

Testament. The others are:

Jehovah-Rapha—"The Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26).

Jehovah-Nissi—"The Lord our banner" (Exodus 17:8-15).

Jehovah-Shalom—"The Lord our peace" (Judges 6:24).

Jehovah-Ra-ah (Roi)—"The Lord our Shepherd" (Psalms 23:1).

Jehovah-Tsidkenu—"The Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6).

Jehovah-Shammah—"The Lord is present" (Ezekiel 48:35).

God swore by Himself (Genesis 22:18) because He couldn't swear by anyone greater (Hebrews 6:13). God's promise in Genesis 22:16-18, confirmed by His oath, includes the blessing of the Gentile nations through Christ. In Genesis 22:17 c God adds to the already vast blessing promised: Abraham's seed would possess the gate of his enemies. This means that his descendants would "occupy the place of authority over those who would oppose them. The capture of the city gate meant the fall of the city itself."¹⁰

Abraham's brother Nahor had 12 sons (Genesis 22:20-24) whereas Abraham had only two—Ishmael and Isaac. How this must have tested Abraham's faith concerning God's promise of seed like the stars of heaven (Genesis 22:17)! It may have prompted him to send Eliezer in search of a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:1-47). Notice Rebekah's name in Genesis 22:23.

05.028. Chapter 23

Genesis 23:1-20 When Sarah died at 127, Abraham bargained with the Hittite inhabitants of Hebron for the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah as a burying place—his only purchase of real estate during his long life of pilgrimage. The passage gives a priceless description of the bargaining that is so typical in Eastern lands. At first, the Hittites suggested that Abraham choose any one of their sepulchers (Genesis 23:6). With overflowing courtesy, Abraham refused and insisted on paying full price for a cave owned by Ephron. At first Ephron offered not just the cave but the entire field as an outright gift (Genesis 23:11), but Abraham understood that this was just a polite gesture. The owner really had no intention of giving it away. When Abraham countered by insisting on his desire to purchase it, Ephron suggested a price of 400 shekels of silver, pretending that this was a great bargain. Actually it was an extortionate price, and ordinarily the buyer would have continued to haggle. So it was a surprise to everyone when Abraham agreed to Ephron's first asking price. Abraham didn't want to be indebted to an unbeliever, and neither should we. The Cave of Machpelah later became the burying place of Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah. The traditional location is now the site of a Moslem Mosque.

05.029. Chapter 24

Genesis 24:1-67

Abraham bound his servant by an oath that in seeking a bride for Isaac, he would not allow him to marry a Canaanite or to live in Mesopotamia (Genesis 24:1-10). The ancient form of oath is described in Genesis 24:2-4, Genesis 24:9. "According to Biblical idiom, children are said to issue from the 'thigh' or loins' of their lather (cf. Genesis 46:26), Placing the hand on the thigh signified that, in the event that an oath were violated, the children who had issued, or might issue from the 'thigh' would avenge the act of disloyalty. This has been called a 'swearing by posterity' and is particularly applicable here, because the servant's mission is to insure a posterity for Abraham through Isaac."¹¹ The servant is a type (symbol) of the Holy Spirit sent by the Father to win a bride for the heavenly Isaac, the Lord Jesus. The narrative carefully records the preparation for the journey, the gifts carried by the servant, and the sign by which he would know the Lord's chosen woman (Genesis 24:1-014). "It was a sign that was calculated to throw much light on the character and disposition of the girl worthy of his master's son. He was merely to ask her for 'a sip'—as the Hebrew word may be rendered—of water for himself: but the one whom God had chosen to be the mother of a great people and a remote ancestress of Jesus Christ would reveal her generous nature and her willingness to serve others by offering him not a mere 'sip' of water but an abundant 'drink.' To this she was also to add the astonishing offer of drawing water for the camels also. Now when we consider that these ten beasts, after the toil of the long desert, were prepared to empty at least four barrels of water in all the spontaneous willingness of the girl of his prayers to serve man and beast would point to a kindly and unselfish disposition and also to a character of the highest order."¹²

It was lovely Rebekah, of course, who fulfilled the conditions and who therefore received the servant's gifts (Genesis 24:15-22). As she led him to her father's home, Abraham's servant knew that his search had ended (Genesis 24:23-27). When Rebekah explained the situation to her brother, Laban, he welcomed the entourage graciously, then heard the servant present his request for Rebekah as a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24:28-49). The marvelous convergence of circumstances in answer to the servant's prayer convinced Laban and Bethuel, Rebekah's father, that the Lord had arranged it all (Genesis 24:50-51). The servant then brought out gifts for Rebekah, Laban, and their mother, sealing the engagement (Genesis 24:63). In the morning, the family wanted to delay her departure, but Rebekah's willingness to go settled the matter (Genesis 24:55-59), and she left with their blessing (Genesis 24:60). The first time we see Isaac after his experience on Mount Moriah is when he went forth to meet Rebekah. So the first time we will see the Savior after His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension is when He returns to claim His chosen bride (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Isaac's meeting with Rebekah is one of tender beauty (Genesis 24:61-67). Without ever having seen her before, he married her and loved her, and, unlike other patriarchs, he had no other wife besides her.

05.030. Chapter 25

Genesis 25:1-34 In 1 Chronicles 1:32 Keturah is called Abraham's concubine. Genesis 25:8 seems to confirm this. Thus she was a lesser wife, one who did not enjoy the full privileges of a wife in the home. Once again God records marital irregularities that he never approved.

Abraham died at 175 and became the second person to be buried in the cave at Hebron (Genesis 25:7-10). The 12 sons of Ishmael listed in Genesis 25:12-18 fulfilled God's promise to Abraham: "Twelve princes shall he beget" (Genesis 17:20). With the death of Ishmael (Genesis 25:17-18), Isaac moves to the center of the stage in the narrative. For almost 20 years after her marriage, Rebekah was barren. Then, in answer to Isaac's prayer, she conceived. The struggle of two sons within her perplexed her (Genesis 25:22) until she was told that her sons would become the heads of rival nations (Israel and Edom) (Genesis 25:23). The firstborn twin was named Esau, meaning "hairy." The other was named Jacob, meaning "supplanter." Even at birth, Jacob tried to gain advantage over his brother by holding his heel (Genesis 25:26)! As the firstborn, Esau was entitled to a double portion of his father's possessions—that is, twice as much as any other son might inherit. He also became the tribal or family head. This was known as the birthright. In Esau's case, it would also have included being the ancestor of the Messiah. One day, as Esau was returning from a hunting trip, he saw Jacob cooking some red vegetable soup. He asked for some of the red stuff so imploringly that he got the nickname "Red" (Edom), and it stuck to him and to his posterity, the Edomites (Genesis 25:19-30). When Jacob offered some soup in exchange for Esau's birthright, Esau foolishly agreed (Genesis 25:31-34). "No food except the forbidden fruit was as dearly bought as this broth."¹³ The prophecy of Genesis 25:23 is partially fulfilled in Genesis 25:29-34. God does not condone Jacob's wheeling and dealing, but one thing is apparent—Jacob valued the birthright and a place in the godly line, while Esau preferred the gratification of his physical appetite to spiritual blessings. The chapter closes by emphasizing Esau's treatment of the birthright rather than Jacob's treatment of his brother. Esau's descendants were bitter foes of Israel. Their final doom is pronounced in Obadiah.

05.031. Chapter 26

Genesis 26:1-35

Isaac reacted to famine as his father had done (Genesis 12:1-20 and Genesis 20:1-18). As he journeyed south, the Lord appeared to him at Gerar and warned him not to go to Egypt (Genesis 26:1-2). Gerar was sort of a halfway house on the route to Egypt. God told Isaac to stay temporarily in Gerar (Genesis 26:3) but instead Isaac “dwelt” there (Genesis 26:6). God also reconfirmed to him the unconditional covenant that He had made with Abraham (Genesis 26:3-5).

Isaac reacted to fear as his father had done. He misrepresented his wife as his sister to the men of Gerar (Genesis 26:6-7). It is the sad story of a father’s weakness being repeated in his son. When the deceit was exposed and rebuked, Isaac confessed (Genesis 26:8-11). Confession leads to blessing. Isaac became wealthy in Gerar—so wealthy that the Abimelech who was then reigning asked him to leave (Genesis 26:12-16). So Isaac moved from Gerar to the Valley of Gerar, not far away (Genesis 26:17). The Philistines (“wanderers”) had filled with debris the wells which Abraham had dug—an unfriendly act signifying that the newcomers were not welcome (Genesis 26:15). Isaac cleaned out the wells. Strife ensued with the Philistines at Esek (“contention”) and Sitnah (“enmity”). Finally Isaac moved away from the Philistines. This time there was no strife when he dug a well, so he called it Rehoboth (“broad places” or “room”). From there he went to Beersheba, where the Lord reassured him with the promise of blessing (Genesis 26:23-25), and where Isaac built an altar, pitched a tent, and dug a well (Genesis 26:25).

Concerning Genesis 26:26-31, Williams says, “It is when Isaac definitely separates himself from the men of Gerar that they come to him seeking blessing from God... The Christian best helps the world when living in separation from it...”¹⁴ Isaac’s servants found water the same day that Isaac made a nonaggression pact with Abimelech. Abraham had previously named the place Beersheba because he made a covenant there with his contemporary, Abimelech (Genesis 21:31). Now, under similar circumstances, Isaac renames it Beersheba.

Esau’s marriage to two pagan women caused grief to his parents (Genesis 26:34-35), as have many other unequal yokes since then. It also brought out further his unfitness for the birthright.

05.032. Chapter 27

Genesis 27:1-46

Approximately 37 years have passed since the events of the previous chapter. Isaac is now 137, his sight has failed, and he thinks he is about to die (Genesis 27:1-2), perhaps because his brother Ishmael had died at that age (Genesis 25:17). But he will live 43 more years, although nothing further is recorded about him in Genesis except his death (Genesis 35:27-29). When Isaac craved some venison from Esau, promising a blessing in return, Rebekah plotted to deceive her husband and to get the blessing for Jacob, whom she loved (Genesis 27:1-17). Her trickery was unnecessary because God had already promised the blessing to Jacob (Genesis 25:23 b). She cooked goat's meat so that it tasted like venison, and put the goat's skins on Jacob's arms to impersonate the hairy Esau (Genesis 27:18-29). Isaac made the mistake of trusting his feelings; the hairy arm "felt" like Esau's. We should not trust our emotional feelings in spiritual matters, for:

Feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving. Our warrant is the Word of God; naught else is worth believing.¹⁵

Although Rebekah planned the deception, Jacob was equally guilty for carrying it out. And he reaped what he sowed. "It has been observed by another that 'whoever observes Jacob's life, after he had surreptitiously obtained his father's blessing, will perceive that he enjoyed very little worldly felicity. His brother sought to murder him, to avoid which he was forced to flee from his father's house; his uncle Laban deceived him... He was obliged to leave him in a clandestine manner... He experienced the baseness of his son Reuben ... the treachery and cruelty of Simeon and Levi towards the Shechemites; then he had to feel the loss of his beloved wife ... the supposed untimely end of Joseph; and to complete all, he was forced by famine to go into Egypt, and there died in a strange land...'"¹⁶

Isaac blessed Jacob with prosperity, dominion, and protection (Genesis 27:23-29). It is interesting that the blessings spoken by the patriarchs were prophetic; they came to pass literally because, in a real sense, these men spoke by inspiration. When Esau returned and learned of the deception, he sought the blessing tearfully. But the blessing had been granted to Jacob and it couldn't be retracted (Hebrews 12:16-17). However, Isaac did have a word for Esau, as follows: "Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck" (Genesis 27:39-40 RSV). This suggests that the Edomites would live in desert places, would be warriors, would be subject to the Israelites, but would one day rebel against this rule. This latter prophecy was fulfilled in the reign of Joram, King of Judah (2 Kings 8:20-22).

Esau planned to kill Jacob as soon as his father would die and the period of mourning would end. When Rebekah learned of this, she told Jacob to head for her brother Laban's home in Haran. She feared not only that Jacob would be killed but that Esau would run away or be killed in a blood

feud, and she would lose two sons at once (v. 45). However, to explain Jacob's departure to Isaac, she said she was afraid Jacob might marry a Hittite, as Esau had done (vv. 41-46). Jacob expected to return soon, but it was not to be for more than 20 years. His father would still be living, but his mother would have passed on.

05.033. Chapter 28

Genesis 28:1-22

Isaac blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan- Aram, a district of Mesopotamia, so that he would find a wife among his mother's people rather than among the Canaanites (Genesis 28:1-5). This inspired Esau to try to regain his father's blessing by marrying a daughter of Ishmael (Genesis 28:8-9). It was a case of doing evil (multiplying wives) that good might come. At Bethel, Jacob had a wonderful dream in which he saw a ladder or staircase extending from earth to heaven. This suggested "the fact of a real, uninterrupted, and close communion between heaven and earth, and in particular between God in His glory and man in his solitude."¹⁷ In His encounter with Nathanael, the Lord Jesus made an apparent reference to this incident and connected it with His second advent and millennial glory (John 1:51). At this time when Jacob's heart was probably filled with regret for the past, loneliness in the present, and uncertainty about the future, God graciously made a covenant with him as He had with Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 28:13-15). Notice the promise of companionship: "I am with thee"; safety: "I will keep thee all places whither thou goest"; guidance: "I will bring thee again into this land"; and personal guarantee: "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Conscious that he had met God there, Jacob changed the name of the place from Luz ("separation") to Bethel ("house of God") (Genesis 28:19). "Prior to Bethel, where Jacob was 'surprised by joy' and 'transfixed by awe,' he had had no personal contact with God. Everything had come to him second-hand."¹⁸

Genesis 28:20-22 seem to present Jacob as one who was bargaining with God. He was actually bargaining for less than God had promised (Genesis 28:14). His faith was not strong enough to take God at His word, so he had to make his tithe conditional on God's performance of His part of the agreement. Another interpretation, however, is that the "if is simply an inherent part of all Hebrew oaths and that Jacob was binding himself to give a tenth unconditionally (see Numbers 21:2; Judges 11:30-31; 1 Samuel 1:11 for similar Hebrew oaths).

05.034. Chapter 29

Genesis 29:1-35

Jacob was 77 when he left Beersheba for Haran. He would spend 20 years serving his uncle Laban, 33 years back in Canaan, and the last 17 years of his life in Egypt. Arriving in Paddan-Aram, he was guided to the very field where some shepherds from Haran were tending their flocks. So perfect was God's timing that Rachel was just arriving with her flock when Jacob was talking with the shepherds (Genesis 29:1-6). Being a good shepherd, Jacob wondered why they were all waiting at the well when there were still daylight hours for feeding the sheep. They explained that, they did not remove the cover from the well until all the herds had arrived (Genesis 29:7-8). It was an emotion-packed moment for Jacob when he met his cousin Rachel (Genesis 29:9-12), and for Laban a short while later when he met his nephew Jacob (Genesis 29:13-14)

Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob in exchange for seven years of service. The years seemed to Jacob but a few days because of the love he had for her (Genesis 29:15-20). Leah was weak-eyed and not attractive. Rachel was beautiful and lovely (Genesis 29:17).

According to custom on the wedding night, it was arranged that the bride should go in to the groom, veiled and perhaps when the room was in darkness. You can imagine how irate Jacob was in the morning when he found that his bride was Leah, Laban had tricked him, but excused the trick on the ground that the older daughter should be married first according to the local custom. Then Laban said, "Complete the week of this one" (that is, carry through on the marriage to Leah, observing the usual festive week) "and we will give you the other" (Rachel) "in return for serving me another seven years" (Genesis 29:27 RSV). At the end of the weeklong wedding feast, Jacob also married Rachel, then served seven more years for her (Genesis 29:21-30). Jacob had sown deceit, and now he was reaping it! When the Lord saw that Leah was hated—that is, loved less than Rachel—He compensated for this by giving her children (Genesis 29:31). This law of divine compensation still operates; People who lack in one area are given extra in another. Leah acknowledged the Lord when she named her children (Genesis 29:32-33, Genesis 29:35). From her comes the priesthood (Levi), the royal line (Judah), and ultimately the Christ. In this chapter we have the first four of the sons of Jacob (Genesis 29:32-35). The complete list is as follows;

Sons born to Leah:

Reuben, meaning "see ye a son" (Genesis 29:32) Simeon, meaning "hearing" (Genesis 29:33) Levi, meaning "joined" (Genesis 29:34) Judah, meaning "praise" (Genesis 29:35) Issachar, meaning "hire" (Genesis 30:18) Zebulun, meaning "dwelling" (Genesis 30:20) Sons born to Bilhah, handmaid of Rachel:

Dan, meaning "judge" (Genesis 30:6) Naphtali, meaning "wrestling" (Genesis 30:8) Sons born to Zilpah, handmaid of Leah:

Gad, meaning “a troop” or “good fortune” (Genesis 30:11) Asher, meaning “happy” (Genesis 30:13) Sons born to Rachel:

Joseph, meaning “adding” (Genesis 30:24) Benjamin, meaning “son of the right hand” (Genesis 35:18)

05.035. Chapter 30

Genesis 30:1-43 In desperation to have a child playing on her knees, Rachel gave her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife or concubine. Even though such arrangements were common in those days, they were contrary to God's will. Bilhah bore two sons, Dan and Naphtali (Genesis 30:1-8). Not to be outdone by Rachel, Leah gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob, and two more sons were born, Gad and Asher (Genesis 30:9-13). The mandrakes which Reuben found were a sort of love-apple, believed by the superstitious to impart fertility. Since Rachel was barren, she was anxious to have some of the mandrakes. In exchange for some of them, she agreed to let Leah live as wife with Jacob. (For some unexplained reason, Leah had apparently lost her privileges as wife.) After this, two more sons were born to Leah—Issachar and Zebulun—and also a daughter, Dinah (Genesis 30:14-21). At last Rachel bore her first son and named him Joseph (Genesis 30:22-24), expressing faith that God would give her still another son (Genesis 30:24). When Jacob told Laban that he wanted to return home to Canaan, his uncle urged him to stay. Laban said he had learned by divination that, the Lord had blessed him because of Jacob (Genesis 30:25-28), and he would meet his wage demands if he would stay (Genesis 30:29-30 a). Jacob agreed to continue serving if Laban would give him all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats and all the black lambs. All other animals in the flock would be acknowledged as Laban's. The latter agreed to the pact, saying, "Good, let it be as you have said" (Genesis 30:34 RSV). Laban took most of the animals designated for Jacob and gave them to his sons to shepherd, realizing that they would probably reproduce with markings that identified them as belonging to Jacob. Then he entrusted his own animals to Jacob, separated from his own sons by a three-day journey (Genesis 30:35-36). This made it impossible for the marked animals in the herds tended, by Laban's sons to breed with Laban's unmarked animals that were tended by Jacob. When breeding Laban's herd, Jacob put peeled rods in front of them, whether they were of solid color or marked. The lambs or kids were born striped, speckled, and spotted (Genesis 30:37-39). This, of course, meant that, they belonged to Jacob. Did the peeled rods actually determine the markings on the animals? There may or may not have been a scientific basis to the method. (New genetic evidence suggests that there might, have been.) How else might the animals have been born with the markings Jacob desired? First of all, it may have been a miracle (see Genesis 31:12). Or it may have been a clever trick on Jacob's part. There are indications in the narrative that, he knew the science of selective breeding. By careful breeding, he not only produced animals with the markings he desired, but he was also able to produce stronger animals for himself and weaker ones for Laban (Genesis 30:41-42). Perhaps the peeled rods were just: a trick to hide his breeding secrets from others. Whatever the explanation, Jacob's wealth increased during his final six years of serving Laban.

05.036. Chapter 31

Genesis 31:1-55

After Jacob discovered that Laban and his sons were growing jealous and resentful, the Lord told him that the time had come to return to Canaan (Genesis 31:1-3). First he called Rachel and Leah and discussed the matter, rehearsing how Laban had cheated him and changed his wages 10 times, how God had overruled so that the flocks always bred in his favor, how God had reminded him of the vow he had made 20 years earlier (Genesis 28:20-22), and how the Lord had told him to return to Canaan. His wives agreed that their father had not dealt honestly and that they should leave (Genesis 31:4-16). Griffith Thomas points out several interesting principles for discerning God's guidance here. First, Jacob had a desire (Genesis 30:25). Secondly, circumstances necessitated a change of some sort. Thirdly, God's word came strongly to him. And finally, there was confirming support from his wives, despite their natural ties to Laban.¹⁹

Before the secret departure, Rachel stole her father's household gods and hid them in her camel's saddle (Genesis 31:18 b). According to Unger, new evidence shows that possession of these household gods implied leadership of the family, and, in the case of a married daughter, assured her husband the right of the father's property.²⁰ Since Laban had sons of his own when Jacob fled to Canaan, they alone had the right to their father's teraphim. Rachel's theft was therefore a serious matter, aimed at preserving for her husband the chief title to Laban's estate. When Laban learned of their departure, he and his men pursued them for a week, but the Lord warned him in a dream not to trouble Jacob and his caravan (Genesis 31:22-24). When he finally overtook them, he only complained that he had been denied the privilege of giving them a royal send-off and that his idols had been stolen (Genesis 31:25-30). To the first complaint Jacob replied that he left secretly for fear that Laban wouldn't let Rachel and Leah go. To the second complaint, he denied having stolen the gods and rashly decreed death for the culprit (Genesis 31:31-32). Laban made a thorough search of the caravan, but in vain; Rachel was sitting on them and excused herself for not getting off the camel's saddle to honor her father because it was her menstrual period (Genesis 31:33-35).

Now it was Jacob's turn to be angry. He denounced Laban for accusing him of theft and for treating him so unfairly for 20 years, in spite of Jacob's faithful and generous service (Genesis 31:36-42). This passage reveals that Jacob was a hard worker and that the blessing of the Lord was upon him in all that he did. Are we faithful to our employers? Does the blessing of God rest upon our work?

Laban avoided the issue by lamely protesting that he would not harm his own daughters, grandchildren, or cattle (Genesis 31:43), then suggested that they should make a pact. It was not a gracious, friendly covenant, asking the Lord to watch over them while they were separated. Rather, it was a compact between two cheats, asking the Lord to make sure that they did what was right when they were out of sight from one another. It was, in effect, a nonaggression treaty, but it also charged Jacob not to treat Laban's daughters harshly nor to marry other wives (Genesis

31:44-50). Laban called the pillar of stone marking the pact jegar-sahadutha, an Aramaic word. Jacob called it Galeed, a Hebrew word. Both words mean “the heap of witness.” Neither man was to pass the stone-heap to attack the other (Genesis 31:51-52). Laban swore by the god of Abraham, the god of Nahor, and the god of their father, Terah (v. 53a). In other words, he swore by the pagan gods which these men had worshipped in Ur. Jacob swore by the fear of his father, Isaac (Genesis 31:53 b)—that is, the God whom Isaac feared. Isaac had never been an idolater.

Jacob first offered a sacrifice, then made a banquet for all those present and camped that night on the mountain (Genesis 31:54). In the morning, Laban said goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren and left for home (Genesis 31:55).

05.037. Chapter 32

Genesis 32:1-32

En route to Canaan, Jacob met a host of angels and called the place Mahanaim, meaning two hosts (Genesis 32:1-2). The two hosts may be God's army (Genesis 32:2) and Jacob's entourage. Or two hosts may be a figurative expression for a great multitude (Genesis 32:10). As Jacob neared the land, he remembered his brother Esau and feared revenge. Would Esau still be angry at the way he had been cheated out of the blessing? First, Jacob sent messengers to Esau with greetings of peace (Genesis 32:3-5). Then when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him with a band of 400 men, he was so terrified that he divided his family into two companies, so that if the first group was destroyed, the second could flee (Genesis 32:6-8). Jacob's prayer (Genesis 32:9-12) was born out of a desperate sense of need for divine protection. It was based on the ground of covenant relationship which the Lord had established with him and his forefathers (Genesis 32:9), and it was prayed in humility of spirit (Genesis 32:10). He based his plea on the word of the Lord (Genesis 32:12) and claimed the promises of God. Jacob next sent three different droves of animals totaling 580 head as gifts for Esau, hoping to appease him (Genesis 32:13-21). Esau would get the gift in three installments. Jacob's maneuvers manifested his unbelief or at least a mixture of faith and unbelief.

After sending his immediate family across the stream Jabbok ("he will empty"), Jacob spent the night alone at Peniel for what was to be one of the great experiences of his life. A man wrestled with him (Genesis 32:24). That man was an angel (Hosea 12:4), the angel of Jehovah, the Lord Himself. The Lord put Jacob's thigh out of joint, causing him to walk with a limp the rest of his life. Although Jacob lost the encounter physically, he won a great spiritual victory. He learned to triumph through defeat and to be strong through weakness. Emptied of self, he confessed he was "Jacob," a supplanter. God then changed his name to Israel ("one who strives with God" or "a prince of God"). Jacob called the name of the place Peniel ("the face of God") because he realized he had seen the Lord (Genesis 32:30).

Genesis 32:32 is still true among Jews today. "The sciatic nerve, or thigh vein, must be removed from the slaughtered animal before that portion of the animal may be prepared for consumption by orthodox Jews."²¹

05.038. Chapter 33

Genesis 33:1-20 As Esau drew near, Jacob lapsed back into tearfulness and fleshly behavior, arranging his household in such a way as to afford maximum protection for those he loved most (Genesis 33:1-2). Jacob himself bowed seven times to the ground as he approached his brother (Genesis 33:3). Esau, by comparison, was relaxed, warm, and effusive as he met Jacob first, then Jacob's wives and children (Genesis 33:4-7). He protested mildly against the extravagant gift of livestock but finally consented to accept it (Genesis 33:8-11). Jacob seems to have shown undue servility to his brother, speaking of himself as his servant (Genesis 33:5). Some think that he resorted to flattery and exaggeration in telling Esau that seeing his face was like seeing God (Genesis 33:10). Others think that the face of God here means a reconciled face. When Esau suggested that they travel back together, Jacob pretended that this would be impossible because of the slow pace required by the children and young animals (Genesis 33:12-14 a). Jacob promised to meet Esau in Seir (Edom) (Genesis 33:14 b), although he had no intention of doing so. Even when Esau tried to leave behind some of his men to travel with Jacob's household, the latter refused the offer without revealing the real reasons—fear and suspicion (Genesis 33:15). At length Jacob arrived at Shechem and settled there, erecting an altar which he called El-elohe-Israel ("God, the God of Israel"). Twenty years earlier, when God had appeared to him at Bethel, Jacob had vowed that the Lord would be his God, that he would give a tenth of his wealth to the Lord, and that he would establish Bethel as God's house (Genesis 28:20-22). Now, instead of returning to Bethel, he settles 30 miles away in the fertile area of Shechem, probably for the sake of his livestock. God does not speak directly to him until several years later, when He calls on Jacob to fulfill his vow (Genesis 35:1-29). In the meantime, the tragic events of Genesis 34:1-31 take place.

05.039. Chapter 34

Genesis 34:1-31 The name of God is not mentioned in this chapter. While Jacob and his family were living in Shechem, his daughter Dinah mingled socially with the heathen women, a breach of proper separation from the ungodly (Genesis 34:2). On one such occasion, Shechem, the son of Hamor, sexually assaulted her, then greatly desired to marry her (Genesis 34:2-3). Realizing that Jacob and his sons were enraged, Hamor proposed a peaceful solution: intermarriage between the Israelites and Canaanites, and full rights for the Israelites as citizens of the land (Genesis 34:8-10). (Genesis 34:9 can be seen as one of many Satanic attempts to pollute the godly line.) Shechem also offered to pay whatever dowry was requested (Genesis 34:11-12). The sons of Jacob had no intention of giving Dinah to Shechem, but they lied that they would do so if the men of the city would be circumcised (Genesis 34:13-17). The sacred sign of God's covenant was to be used wickedly. In good faith, Hamor, Shechem, and all the men of the city met the condition (Genesis 34:18-21). But while they were recovering from the surgery, Simeon and Levi treacherously murdered them and plundered their wealth (Genesis 34:25-30). When Jacob administered a mild rebuke, Simeon and Levi answered that their sister should not have been treated like a harlot (Genesis 34:30-31). Actually Jacob seemed to be more concerned about his own welfare than the horrible injustice that had been done to the men of Shechem. Notice his eight uses of the first-person pronoun in verse 30.

05.040. Chapter 35

Genesis 35:1-29 This chapter opens with God's command to Jacob to fulfill the vow made about 30 years earlier (Genesis 28:20-22). The Lord used the tragic events of the previous chapter to prepare the patriarch to do it. Notice that the Lord is referred to about 20 times in this chapter, in contrast, to no references in Genesis 34:1-31. Before obeying God's command to return to Bethel, Jacob first ordered his family to put away the foreign household gods and to put on clean clothes (Genesis 35:3-4). As soon as they did this, they became a terror to their heathen neighbors (Genesis 35:5). It was appropriate that Jacob should build an altar at Bethel and worship the God who had protected him from his brother, Esau (Genesis 35:6-7). Once again God stated that Jacob's name was now Israel (Genesis 35:10) and renewed the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 35:11-13). The patriarch marked the sacred spot with a pillar and once again named the place Bethel (Genesis 35:14-15). As Jacob's family journeyed south from Bethel, Rachel died in childbirth. She had named the child Benoni ("son of my sorrow"), but Jacob named this twelfth son Benjamin ("son of my right hand") (Genesis 35:16-18). These two names pre-picture the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. Rachel's tomb may still be seen on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Why was she not buried with Abraham, Sarah, and Rebekah in the cave of Hebron? Perhaps it was because she had brought idols into the family (Genesis 31:19). A brief mention is made of Reuben's sin with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22), a sin by which he forfeited the birthright (49:3, 4). The last sentence in Genesis 35:22 begins a new paragraph: "Now the sons of Jacob were twelve." The next two verses list the 12 sons. Though it says in Genesis 35:26 that these sons were born to Jacob in Paddan-aram, Benjamin (Genesis 35:24) is excepted. He was born in Canaan (Genesis 35:16-19).

Jacob returned to Hebron in time to see his father, Isaac, before he died (Genesis 35:27-29). His mother, Rebekah, had died some years earlier. Three funerals are recorded in this chapter: that of Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah (Genesis 35:8); of Rachel (Genesis 35:19); and of Isaac (Genesis 35:29).

05.041. Chapter 36

Genesis 36:1-43 This chapter is devoted to the descendants of Esau, who dwell in the land of Edom, southeast of the Dead Sea. The genealogy represents the fulfillment of the promise that Esau would be the head of a nation (Genesis 25:23). Esau had three or possibly four wives, depending on whether some of the women had two names (compare Genesis 36:34; Genesis 28:9; Genesis 36:2-3). In Genesis 36:24 Anah found "hot springs" (NASB) in the wilderness, not "mules" (KJV). Moses, the author of Genesis, knew by divine revelation (see Genesis 35:11) that Israel would eventually have kings (Genesis 36:31). As seven generations of the ungodly line of Cain were given in Genesis 4:1-26, so seven generations of kings in the ungodly line of Esau are mentioned here in Genesis 36:33-39. Seven, the number of completeness, probably indicates the entire line. Not one of Esau's descendants is mentioned in God's registry of the faithful; all are lost in the obscurity of those who depart from the living God. They had temporary riches and the passing fame of this world, but nothing for eternity.

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