

FINDING GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE

By George R. Sledd,
Sanford, Florida

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou,



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Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And

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STUDIES IN ACTS

by Willard Willis

"So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timothy and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season" (Acts 19:22).

Paul, as you will recall, had purposed to visit Jerusalem. He, however, before taking his journey, sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia for the purpose of strengthening the various churches and for the purpose of



Willard Willis

taking up an offering for the poor saints back in Jerusalem. It was an offering which Paul planned to present to them when he had made his trip there. Paul knew that Timothy and Erastus would be well received in the area of Macedonia, since Timothy had been there with Paul at an earlier date. Erastus would also be well received, since he had been the chamberlain, or treasurer of the city of Corinth (Romans 16:15). We know from II Corinthians 8:1-3 that the churches in Macedonia responded in a liberal man-

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Truth is in order to goodness

WORKS, FAITH, AND GRACE; ACCORDING TO JAMES

by Gene Darwin Abbott

I think almost every document known to man was written with some supposition in mind. I think, too, in almost every case, the writer has not only presumed something to be true; but has (at

least subconsciously) presumed his readers were aware of this. I recently used an office device to aid in the binding of paper-back documents. I'd been told (briefly) how it worked and it seemed fairly simple. I went to the loca-

tion of the mechanism, and it even displayed printed instructions. I read the instructions, then scratched my head, and asked myself: "What does this mean?" Of course, the people who printed

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"To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"—Isaiah 8:20.

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WHAT WAS JESUS CHRIST DOING BEFORE BETHLEHEM?

by Troy Sheppard

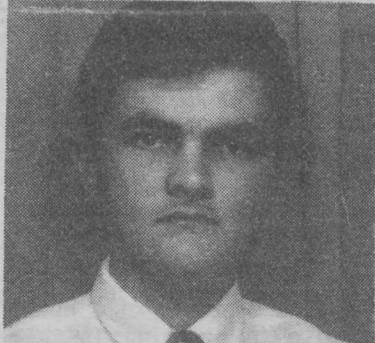
Matthew 2:1 says, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem..." This text takes us back about two thousand years. As we look back into time we see a joyous occasion taking place; for, in the city of David a baby is born. This baby is not just another baby. He is the prophesied Messiah, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

At Bethlehem we see the going forth of the everlasting one (Micah 5:2). There we see God come in the flesh. Nine months earlier, in the womb of the virgin Mary, under the shadow of the Holy Ghost, Jesus Christ joined His person, from that point in time throughout all eternity, with a perfectly sinless human nature (body and soul) that had been prepared for Him by the Father (Heb. 10:5).

At Bethlehem Matthew 1:23 came to pass which says, "Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." This verse says, "God with us," for Jesus Christ is God.

The Bible declares the deity of Christ many times. The doctrine of His deity is a doctrine that is without controversy (I Timothy 3:16). One must believe and submit himself to this doctrine or be eternally lost.

Concerning the deity of Christ John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:1



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and 14). Here John says that Jesus was God; not a god, but God! Then he says Jesus was made flesh; this was done in the womb of the virgin Mary. Finally, he says Jesus dwelt on earth, and this came to pass at Bethlehem. John also records the words of Thomas, "And Thomas

answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). As Thomas looked at the spear riven side and the nail pierced hands of Jesus Christ he humbly bowed before Him, declaring His deity. Jesus Christ truly is God.

Seeing that Jesus Christ is the eternal God of the Bible, the question arises, "What was Jesus Christ doing before Bethlehem?"

Before Bethlehem Jesus Christ was in total unity and sweet communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 8:22, 23 and 30 says, "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him" Here we see the unity of the God-head. Christ was in the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit throughout all eternity past. We see this blessed unity and sweet communion long before Bethlehem.

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The Baptist Examiner Pulpit

A Sermon by Pastor Joseph M. Wilson

THE UNBELIEF OF MAN DOES NOT AFFECT THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself" (II Tim. 2:11-13). This is one of five "faithful sayings," in the Pastoral Epistles. The others are I Timothy 1:15; 3:1 (called "a true saying" but the same in the Greek); 4:9, and Titus 3:4-8. These are

called "faithful sayings," not because there are any unfaithful sayings in God's Word, but for special emphasis. They are precious portions of Holy Writ.

My text is in v.13, but let us look briefly at the preceding context. In vs 11-12 there are three positive parts and three negative parts. We learn from these that loyalty and faithfulness to Christ will be rewarded, and that disloyalty and unfaithfulness will be punished.

Now, look at v.13. There is a

slight surprise as we read this verse. It does not set forth a punishment upon us if we believe not, but sets forth the positive statement that He remaineth faithful. There are those who feel that there must be a punishment in this couplet to compare with that in the other three. So they understand that the verse means that if we believe not, He will be faithful in punishing us for our unbelief. I do not believe that

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STATEMENTS MADE BY PETER IN MATTHEW

by Eldon Joslin

The statements that we are about to study show us that Peter was one to put his mouth in motion before putting his mind in gear. I know for a fact that I have done this several times, so I believe that I can understand just a little of Peter's position. Sometimes when doing this a profound statement will come forth, but most of the time things are said that have very little value. Many of these statements could lead to problems.



Eldon Joslin

This reminds me of the fellow that was going home from church and said that he would like to give the preacher a piece of his mind. His neighbor stopped him with the statement that he could ill afford to lose many more pieces. A very wise man once said, "It is better to be quiet and let someone think you are a fool."

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STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF PAUL PART 24

by John R. Gilpin

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

It has been remarkably impressed upon me how that everything we do, as God's people, is to be for the glory of God. In the final analysis, we have no business to draw a breath, to eat a morsel of food, nor to drink a glass of water to quench our thirst except it be for the glory of God. Within these chapters of studying the ministry of the



John Gilpin, Sr.
(Now in Glory)

Apostle Paul, I have been truly amazed as to how much the glory of God is magnified in all the Bible. For example, we read: "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD

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UNBELIEF

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that is the meaning of this verse. I believe this 13th verse is teaching that whether or not we believe the promises of God, He will still be true to His Word and faithful to His promises. I hope to show what a wonderful truth this is. Our not believing God's promises will not defeat the eternal purposes of a sovereign God, nor will our unbelief cause God to fail to keep His promises.

There is a popular saying, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it." This saying is totally wrong. It is the product of the proud mind of man seeking glory for himself. Why, it puts man right up there with God, as if man believing it is co-equal with God saying it, in making it so. The truth is, "God said it, and that settles it" whether you believe it or not. It is sort of like that old, false saying, "If the Lord's willing and the creek don't rise." The truth is that if the Lord is willing, it doesn't matter what the creek does. What God says is true. Your believing it will not make it any more true; your disbelieving it will not make it false.

It is of the essential nature of God that He cannot lie. He is truthful; He is faithful. "...God, that cannot lie..." (Tit.1:2). Some would argue that God can do anything. No, no, God cannot sin and God cannot lie. "...great is thy faithfulness" (Lam.3:23). God is as great and true in His faithfulness as in any of His other attributes. "God is faithful ..." (I Cor.1:9). If God should ever

prove unfaithful, He would deny His very character; would deny Himself. God has more at stake in His being faithful than we do. If He should ever, one time prove unfaithful, He would cease to be God as we know Him through His Word. He would fall from His throne. He would lose the respect, trust, admiration, and worship of the whole universe. Who could worship an unfaithful God? If God ever told a lie - and to be unfaithful is to tell a lie - who could ever believe anything else He said. You know how it is when a man lies to you. You



Joe Wilson

have great difficulty believing anything he says in the future. Oh, it is essential to the godness of God that He be a God of truth, a God of faithfulness. He would lose all of His worshippers in a moment of time should He ever be untrue or unfaithful.

God has made many statements, precepts, prophecies, promises, and warnings. He will be faithful in all these things. His statements of fact, of history, of doctrines are all absolutely true. His promises will all be kept. His prophecies will all come to pass. Men will be held strictly accountable to all His precepts. His warnings will all be carried out.

Now let us notice the phrase, "If we believe not." Let us, first of all, apply it to the unsaved. If one does not believe the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, God still remains true to the free offer and wonderful promise thereof. In the gospel, God offers eternal life to everyone who hears that gospel, upon the conditions of repentance and faith. Yes, I believe in the free offer of the gospel. God is most sincere in this gospel. Not one person has ever met these conditions of repentance and faith and not been saved. God's gospel offer and promise remains forever true no matter what the individual sinner does. Multiplied millions have proved the faithfulness of God to His gospel. They have repented of their sins and believed that gospel; and have been gloriously, wonderfully, blessedly, and eternally saved.

God has warned the unsaved of the eternal, burning hell that awaits them if they continue in their sins and turn away from, despise, and reject His gospel. Men may laugh at hell - now. Men may not believe in hell - now. Men may be Universalists, Modernists, Jehovah's false Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists - none of these believe God's warnings of an eternal hell - but God will remain true to His warnings; He will carry them out. Men will learn in the torments of hell that, though they believe not, God remains true to His Word.

Grandmother may say, "If you do that, I will beat you half to death." The grandchild knows she will not do this, so goes ahead

and does that against which such a terrible warning was uttered. The grandchild was right. He may have been scolded a little bit, but he was not beaten half to death - Grandmother did not mean it when she said it. But, my friend, God is not like that. God will do exactly, with reference to the punishment of the unsaved, as He said in His Word that He would. The agonizing screams of the tormented in hell fire will, each and every one of them, prove the faithfulness of God to His Word.

Now, the main point of this message is to apply this precious truth to the saved, and especially as to the promises of God. God has made many wonderful promises to His children. Some of them simply stagger our imagination - they seem too wonderful (God forgive us for even thinking this) to be true. No believer will ever find himself in a circumstance or a situation that there is not a promise in the Word of God that exactly suits that. Oh, there is a promise of God that was tailor-made for just the situation you are now in. Learn the promises of God - you will need them later on. Become acquainted with His precious promises, and then in a time of great need, the Holy Spirit will bring to mind the promise of God that exactly meets your need and blessedly apply it to your soul.

Now, it is most likely that we all have had and do at times have trouble believing the precious promises of God. This is a terrible thing to say, but is it not true? Who among us has not had this experience: Something seemingly sad and bad happens in our lives. We say, "I just cannot see how that could possibly be for my good." We find ourselves having difficulty believing that precious promise of Romans 8:28 - is it not so? Oh, this is an evidence of the remaining depravity that is still in the children of God. We believe men, but sometimes have trouble believing God.

This doubting of God is sin and folly. It is wrong to have the slightest suspicion of a doubt relative to anything He has promised. It is great folly to doubt His promises. Has any of them ever failed? Is there anywhere in the totality of the saved children of God one soul who will testify that God failed to keep one of His promises? Has God ever proved untrue to His Word? Not so, then why do we sometimes doubt Him?

Men fail to keep their promises. Sometimes they did not intend to keep them when they made them. Sometimes they change their mind and decide to not keep them. Sometimes, though they meant them and want to keep them; they find themselves unable to do so. None of these things are ever true with God. He never made a promise He did not mean to keep. He never changes His mind about anything. Surely, Omnipotence is able to do that which He declared. He is able to fulfill with His hand whatsoever His mouth has spoken (I Kings 8:24).

Here is the heart of what I want to say in this message: God will keep His promise whether we believe it or not. Our unbelief will not disannul His promise. Read II Tim.2:13 again, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Our unbelief cannot and does not affect the faithfulness of God. Oh, brother and sis-

ter, I cannot conceive of a more wonderful truth than this.

We cannot lose the reality, the present and eternal benefit, of even one of the promises of God. Of course, I do not refer to the promises of God that are predicated upon some condition to be performed by man - there are many such. I am speaking of that vast multitude of the unconditional promises of God - that are solemnly guaranteed by God - that do not depend upon any attitude or work of man. I am saying that, whether we believe them or not, we cannot lose the blessings promised therein. Let me illustrate. Everything will work together for the good of God's children according to Romans 8:28. Nothing can change this. This will be true whether or not the child of God is able to totally believe this promise. The Lord will never leave nor forsake one of His children according to Hebrews 13:5. No sin, no unbelief of the child of God will ever drive the Saviour from His side. He

will not forsake His obedient and believing child. Neither will He forsake His doubting and sinning child. He will always provide all the needs of His children according to Philippians 4:19. One of His might grumble, despair, murmur, believe that he is going to perish, but still all of his needs will be supplied. The one who is saved will always be saved and will go to heaven, though through the influence of false doctrines he might fear that he will lose his salvation. What a thrilling and joyful surprise it will be when the "Falling from grace one can lose his salvation" heretic (if he is truly saved) learns that his doctrine was false, and that God has kept His promise of eternal salvation to that man, though he did not believe it. Oh, beloved, the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises is not affected by the unbelief of man.

Though God will keep His promises whether or not men believe them, there is still much

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FROM THE EDITOR

One of the most mis-used and perverted teachings of our day is that of "The Separation of Church and State." Enemies of decency, morality, Christianity, and true Americanism have used it against these things. Promoters of pornographic filth, homosexual wickedness, crime, the murder of abortion, drugs, drunkenness, and innumerable other sins have used this teaching to carry out their dastardly deeds. I might add the lottery to this group of sins promoted in this way.

If history can teach us anything, it teaches that the men who established the teaching of the separation of church and state did not have in mind that it be used as it is wickedly used today. They never meant for this to be used to promote the wickedness of this day.

We are told that the passing of laws promoting Biblical decency would be to tear down this mythical wall. We are told that to prosecute adulterers and homosexuals would be to break down this mythical wall. We are told that to demand that "Blue Laws" that are still on the statute books, or to make laws relative to the proper closing of places of business and entertainment on the Lord's Day would be to break down this mythical wall. Brother, some of the most wicked men in this world, promoting some of the most terrible sins of this day are perverting this doctrine of separation of church and state to aid and abet in their vile crimes.

These people are liars and hypocrites. They know that the founding fathers of our country never intended that this teaching be used in the way it is used today. The Supreme Court is responsible for much of this. One would think that a court would have to consider the plain and definite intention of the framers of a law in the interpreting of that law. How many laws has the Supreme Court perverted from the clear meaning of the framers of those laws by the false interpretations thereof. Why we can make any laws we desire, but when we give a man or a body the right to interpret those laws, we give them the right to write new laws under the guise of "interpretation."

This wicked and false perversion of the separation of church and state has done some of its greatest and most destructive and far reaching damage in the school rooms of our nation. One of its biggest crimes was the removal of Bible reading and prayer from our schools. There is nothing wrong with this practice. There is nothing unconstitutional about it. For many years after the doctrine of separation of church and state was adopted, Bible reading and prayer were practiced in all, or nearly all, of our schools. And I tell you that our schools in those days produced much better young people than they do today.

Of course, I am not in favor of teaching denominational distinctive doctrines in our schools - and that is all that our founding fathers meant to do. They were not against Christianity; they were against the government establishing, supporting, or enforcing any denomination of professing Christians. I wish our schools would return to the way they were when I was a student. I remember in my senior year that we had a six week study of Biblical literature - and it did not hurt us at all. I remember a Christian principal who was an example to us all. He was not afraid to expound the Word of God in chapel programs.

Now that they have the Bible reading and prayer mostly out of schools, they are seeking to deprive anyone, student or teacher, from even reading the Bible in spare time during school hours. We are allowing atheists, infidels, drunks, whores and whoremongers, and haters of God and Christianity to decide what we are going to do in our schools and in our country - in many cases. We can teach the lie of evolution, but we are not to teach the truth of creationism. We can teach children about physical sex, but we can't teach them the Biblical standard of sexual morality. No wonder many young people are as wicked as they are - it is to a large degree the fault of our schools and our parents - it is the fault of those anti-God, anti-decency, anti-morality people who are setting our standards, and who are using their perversion of the separation of church and state to destroy the church and the state - along with Americanism and common decency.

The Berlin wall came down. I suppose we are all glad of that. But I know of no wall that needs to come down as badly as the wall of separation of church and state as it is practiced, rather perverted, in our day. Comments welcomed.

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that one can lose by not believing God's promises. Man can lose the peace, contentment, joy, strength, and encouragement that comes through believing the promises of the Lord. It is important that we believe God's promises for our own present blessings. A man, once saved is always saved; but he will not have the great joy of blessed assurance of eternal salvation unless He believes God's promises of eternal security. He can worry and fret and be afraid that he will lose his salvation and go to hell. He will not lose his salvation, but he will lose the joy and blessing of the wonderful truth of once saved always saved.

All things will work together for good, even for the saved person who does not believe Romans 8:28; but he will lose the peace and joy and encouragement that would be his by believing this wonderful promise of God. God will supply all the needs of the child of God, whether that man believes Philippians 4:19 or not, but by not believing that, one might worry and fret and wonder whatever is going to happen to him. Now apply this

line of thought to many of the promises of God. You can lose much of present blessedness by not believing God's promises, but He still abideth faithful; He will still keep that promise. Oh, this is a wonderful truth. Our faith is often so weak, but the strength of God's promises, the keeping of those promises, does not depend upon the strength of our faith. We can lose much by unbelief in these precious promises, but we cannot lose the reality and the fulfilling of those promises. He abideth faithful; praise God, praise God!

Let us notice some examples of this truth. God's dealings with the nation of Israel is an illustration of my text. Though Israel murmured and complained, and often doubted in the wilderness, God still brought the nation into Canaan and blessed them in so many ways. Though many preachers tell us that God is through with Israel, they are still a nation among the nations of the earth; and God will yet keep all the promises that He has made to Israel. Though the Amillennialists tell us that there will never be a glorious thousand year reign of Christ on this earth, God will keep His multitude of promises about this. That glad and glad-some day will come. Though the Post-tribber tells us that we

might go into the Tribulation, yet Jesus will rapture all the previously saved to be with Him before the Tribulation begins. Abraham and Sarah began to doubt the promise of God that Sarah would have a son. Because of this unbelief Sarah encouraged Abraham to have a son by her maid, Hagar; and Abraham consented to this sin of unbelief. But in spite of their unbelief and sin, the day came when Sarah embraced a son of her own, even Isaac. Rebekah doubted that God would keep His promise concerning Jacob. Believing that Isaac was going to give the blessing to Esau (contrary to the promise and purpose of God) she encouraged Jacob in a lying deception of Isaac in order to secure the blessing. In spite of the effort of Isaac, and the lie and deceit of Rebekah and Jacob, God gave the blessing to Jacob. Oh, Rachel and Jacob could have saved themselves from a terrible sin had they just believed the promise of God.

Zacharias' unbelief concerning the promise of God given through the angel did not keep God from fulfilling His promise to give him and Elisabeth a son, John the Baptist; but it did bring nine months of dumbness on Zacharias as punishment for his unbelief. Beloved, our unbelief

cannot and will not affect the faithfulness of our God - He remaineth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.

This is true relative to salvation. God will save all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. He will save all such eternally, though many churches do not believe this precious truth, and even preach against it. Their unbelief of and preaching against eternal security will not change the faithfulness of God in giving everlasting life to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:18 will be fulfilled. The Sovereign Grace Landmark Missionary Baptist Church that Jesus started during His earthly ministry will be perpetuated until His coming again. Multitudes have tried to keep this from coming to pass, have tried to destroy true Baptist churches from the face of the earth. Multitudes (even many who call themselves Baptists) do not believe this promise, but true churches are still here, and will be here until Jesus comes in the rapture. The unbelief of man has not affected the faithfulness of God in this wonderful promise.

Men may not believe in God's sovereign and eternal predestination of all things, but God has, is, and will control all things and bring all things to pass according to His eternal and sovereign will. Even as men fight this doctrine with all their might, they are fulfilling it in their so doing - they are (as the great Spurgeon said) running in the very path that God marked out for them before the foundation of the world. Onesimus stole some thing from his master, Philemon, and ran away; he ran as fast and as far as he could, and when he quit running he was sitting at the feet of the Apostle Paul and hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was where God had predestinated him to be at that time, and he there, through the preaching of the gospel (I am not a Hardshell heretic) and the working of the Spirit experienced the salvation God had purposed for him before the foundation of the world.

Men may not believe God's prophecies - and many of them do not. We have Post Millennialists and Amillennialists who do not believe in the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ on and over this earth with His glorified saints. But it will come to pass just the same. These men who do not believe it will yet share in the glory thereof. Their unbelief will not stop the prophecies of God, and will not even keep them from the blessedness thereof. We have Post-tribbers and Mid-tribbers who do not believe that the previously saved will all be raptured before the Tribulation begins. But their unbelief will not change the prophetic program of God, and will not even keep them from going in the rapture. These men may (I doubt even this) be somewhat embarrassed when things turn out so differently from what they had believed and preached, but they will be glad it is so, and they will enjoy the reality of these things just as much as we who believed the prophecies of God relative thereto.

Men may doubt the promises of God, but they will all be kept by the faithful God, and the doubters will experience the blessings of the keeping thereof.

Men may disbelieve the warnings of God concerning eternal,

burning hell for all who die without Christ; but those warnings will be carried out and men will suffer eternally in the hell in which they did not believe.

God will be faithful in all that He has said. Man's unbelief cannot and will not affect the faithfulness of God. This message has blessed my soul. I hope it will be a blessing to each reader.

PAUL

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of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:3).

This was at the time when King Uzziah had died. He had had a glorious reign. It is often said that Uzziah's reign was the golden age of Israel. It seemed like the people couldn't see the Lord because of Uzziah. His reign was so glorious and his kingdom was so dazzling that whenever the people looked in any direction they saw Uzziah and his glory. Now that he has died, the people are able to look beyond the kingdom of Israel and Uzziah's glory, and they see the glory of God, to the extent that Isaiah even saw the seraphim as they stood in God's presence to magnify God's glory.

The seraphim is one of the orders of angelic beings, and the word, "seraphim," literally means "a burning Glory." This actually tells us that the seraphim were so holy that they burned in their own holiness, yet when they stood in the presence of a thrice-holy God, they covered their feet, they covered their eyes, they covered their face, and they cried, saying, "...Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

I rather imagine that what the seraphim declared in this day, some eight hundred years before the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, could just as truly be declared today. In spite of the Khrushchevs -- in spite of the Castros -- in spite of all the individuals of this world who walk contrary to God, we can still say that the whole earth is full of the glory of God.

We read: "Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him" (Isa. 43:7).

If you will notice, Isaiah isn't talking about all the creation. He isn't talking about every man who has been created and put here within this world. Rather, he is talking about those who have been called of the Lord, and he declares that they have been created for the glory of God. God never yet has saved a man and called that man unto Himself for salvation but what prior to that, God had formed him, God had made him, and God called him for His own glory.

Then in the book of Haggai we find a prophecy that even the temple of God of the latter day is for God's glory. Listen: "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:7).

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ACTS

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ner to Timothy and Erastus. Paul, in pursuing this matter said:

"But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (II Corinthians 9:6-8).

Our text informs us that Paul, after purposing to go up to Jerusalem, still remained in Asia for a season. Ephesus was in Asia, which, no doubt, means that he remained there for a season, or, at least, until Timothy and Erastus returned with the gift for the poor saints at Jerusalem.

"And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen" (Acts 19:23, 24).

The key words in the text before us are "that way." We, in fact, have learned from verses eighteen and nineteen of this chapter that many had turned from the way of Diana to "that way," or to the truth of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many, who had used "curious arts, brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." It becomes obvious that this new way, or "that way" had been heartily embraced by many people in the city of Ephesus.

Demetrius, who stood to suffer

a considerable loss of income, decided to fight back. He, of course, was not aware that his battle was with God rather than men. Demetrius was a silversmith, or one who worked in silver. A silversmith, in fact, is one who works in silver in any way, either in making money, stamping silver, or in making utensils from it. The work done by Demetrius was that of making shrines for Diana. A shrine properly refers to a case, small chest, or box. It particularly refers to a box in which sacred things are placed. This is where the term "shrines for relics" comes from.

The "shrines" which Demetrius made were small portable temples, or edifices, made of silver. These were made to represent the temple of Diana. They probably contained a silver image of the goddess Diana. The temple of Diana, after all, was one of the seven wonders of the world. This fact meant that even strangers, who visited Ephesus, would probably purchase one of Demetrius's shrines. It is a well known fact that pagans throughout the world are accustomed to carry with them small images, or representations of their gods. The Romans had such images in all of their houses. These were called "penates," or household gods. The Scriptures also make reference to such images (see Genesis 31:19 and Judges 7:5).

Diana, the goddess in whose honor Demetrius made his shrines, was a celebrated goddess of the heathen. She, in fact, was one of the twelve superior deities. In the heavens, she was Luna (the moon); on earth she was Diana; and in hell, Hecate. She was sometimes represented with a crescent (the moon at any stage between the new moon and first quarter) on her head, a bow in her hand, and dressed in a hunting garb. She, at other times, was represented with a triple face, and with instruments of torture. She was commonly regarded as the goddess of hunting. She was also represented with a great number of breasts, so as to denote that she was the fountain of

blessings. Diana was worshipped in Egypt, Athens, Cilicia, and among heathen nations generally. Her most celebrated place of worship was in Ephesus.

"Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised... whom all Asia and the world worshippeth" (Acts 19:25-27).

We know from Acts 19:18 that many who had heard the same message which Demetrius heard, believed. They, in fact, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and they showed by action that "they be no gods which are made with hands." Demetrius and his cohorts, on the other hand, were only hardened by that which Paul had to say. They saw Paul as a danger to themselves and their society at large.

It is interesting to note just how far Paul's message had reached. Demetrius was not a believer, yet he was aware of what the great apostle had said. The other silversmiths were also aware of Paul's message. Witnessing is like casting a large stone into the sea. We never know how far the waves will reach. Let me add that it is our responsibility to witness, but it is up to our God to give the increase, or bring about results. Those, in fact, who stand before the judgment seat of Christ, will not be rewarded by how many souls were saved, but by how faithful they were to witness.

That which concerned Demetrius was that his craft and the temple of Diana were in dan-

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The Baptist Examiner Forum I

SUBMIT QUESTIONS ON ANY BIBLE SUBJECT
THE BAPTIST EXAMINER--P.O. BOX 60--ASHLAND, KENTUCKY 41105-0060

What does "poor in spirit" mean in Matt. 5:3?

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Matthew 5: 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." I think it is very important to note that this is the first of the Beatitudes. I feel that the reason is that many of the others depend upon this one. This is the place to start our life of Christian service unto God. This is also the beginning of our having the proper attitude towards God and others. The best definition that I can think of for the Beatitudes is this; "Be in the attitude you should be in as a child of God." That pretty well sums up these verses.

Let me first mention some things that poor in spirit does not mean. It gives no credence at all to the Catholic idea of taking oaths of poverty. There is a big difference in being poor and being poor in spirit. The Bible no where tells us that we must be poor. It does warn us of the dangers of riches and of being too concerned about them. It does not teach we are to take oaths of poverty. This is not the meaning of poor in spirit.

This phrase also does not mean we are to be spiritually poor. There is a difference in being poor in spirit and being spiritually poor. If we are spiritually poor, it is our own fault. We should be as rich spiritually as we can possibly be. This is not an excuse for those saints who possess little spirituality. This phrase also does not give an excuse for being poor spirited. Often times our poor spirits are a great detriment to Christianity. We are always down and depressed when we should be rejoicing in the things of God. Christian people should not be of a poor spirit. They should not be constant pessimists. This is not what is meant by "poor in spirit."

Let me briefly try and explain what I believe Christ means by "poor in spirit." I believe this is just another way of Christ presenting to His people the importance of humility. We know that the disciples needed lessons in humility, as we do. We must realize that we will never be what we can or should be as Christians until we are of an humble spirit. The Bible so emphasizes, humility that we surely see the importance of it. We must be poor in our own spirit that we might be rich in Christ's spirit. We must first empty ourselves, that we might be full of Christ. We must know

that we are weak in the flesh, and need the strength which is available to us through Christ. When Jesus tells us to be "poor in spirit" He is telling us to depend upon Him. He is warning us of the dangers of spiritual pride. Let us indeed beware of this pride and let us seek to be poor in spirit. Let us follow the steps of Christ in humility. This is evidence and proof that we are saved and will enter the kingdom of heaven. May God bless you all.

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Please read Matthew 5:1-12. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

The emphasis of the sermon on the mount before us is to show the characteristics of a born again person. The beatitudes recorded for us here do not show a person how to be saved, but they show the characteristics that are to be manifested in the life of the saved. The emphasis of the entire sermon is to show how a person who is in right relationship with God should conduct his or her life. The standards of the entire sermon and the accompanying rewards are sometimes general, sometimes specific, and sometimes future. In fact, we can say that each promise of the seven promises here (the eighth is a result of having the seven) has a present and a future fulfillment. These seven beatitudes go together and are inseparable to create a complete Christian character and the blessedness of each part.

"Poor in spirit" is the opposite of "proudly self-sufficient". Physical poverty is not what is primarily in view here. Physical poverty itself is not a blessing, nor does it always inherit a blessing. We are speaking here of the spiritual and not just the physical poverty. All of mankind is poor spiritually. They all alike are indebted with an indebtedness that they cannot repay. They cannot provide for themselves spiritually; they cannot help themselves. In fact, the majority think themselves the opposite of what I have just mentioned. They, like some of the ancient Laodiceans, are in a terrible state. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold

tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." (Revelation 3:17,18) True wealth is found only in God's grace.

The poor in spirit are those who consciously depend on God, not themselves. They recognize that they are poor in the sense that they can do no good thing without divine assistance. They have no power of themselves to help themselves to do what God requires them to do. Being poor inwardly and having no ability in themselves to please God, they realize that ".....there is none that doeth good, no not one." (Romans 3:12b) The poor in spirit recognize that Christ must meet their needs. Favor with God and His sufficiency are to be desired above the world's riches and provision. So then "blessed", ie. happy, fortunate is the believers inner condition who knows this. He inherits the "kingdom of the heavens" which is a general designation of the dwelling place of the saved. Blessed are the unselfish. Happy are those who live in dependence on Him, and not on themselves; for these are the truly poor in spirit.

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"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The first thing that should be understood is that the so-called sermon on the mount was not a sermon delivered directly to the general public. Though there was a multitude of people within earshot of His voice, according to Matthew 5:1 and 7:28-8:1, He opened His mouth to His disciples. Therefore, the first and primary application, and maybe the only application, is to believers and not the world. The Lord's references to God the Father as being "your Father" is another proof of this fact.

Secondly, the beatitudes look to the future kingdom of heaven. Our hope is not in this world, but in the world to come. However, the future kingdom of heaven is our possession now. "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Thirdly, since this is a message from the very Son of God to those who have been quickened in their spirit, we must make a spiritual application. I did not say a mystical application, but a spiritual application.

Fourthly, notice that there is a promise contained in this beatitude, and that promise can only

apply to the elect of God. No one else will see the kingdom, much less enter in. "Except a man be born again he cannot see... cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:3,5) It is a definite promise to the "poor in spirit." They now possess the kingdom, and one day shall enter therein.

Poor in spirit is the same as humble in spirit. God says to us in Psalms 147:3, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."; Psalms 34:18 "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Psalms 51:17. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit..."

There is nothing more pleasing to God in His children than a genuine, humble, broken spirit before Him. When God is pleased, the poor in spirit are blessed. When God is pleased with His children He pours out His blessings upon them.

Finally, the poor in spirit are blessed because they have a blessed hope. There is nothing in this life that can quench that happy anticipation of the kingdom to come. The child of God prays and yearns for that coming kingdom where all will be blessed forever. If you are ever to see that blessed kingdom then you must become poor in spirit. Thank you for your question.

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"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

This Beatitude, along with the three following ones describe people who have become aware of their deep need and their being helpless to meet that need. They describe those who rely only upon God to meet that need. It is on these whom God bestows His blessings, not as rewards for their service but as unmerited favor.

God's blessing is given to the "poor in spirit." To be "poor in spirit" is to have an humble opinion of self, realizing that there is no righteousness in self. The "poor in spirit" must look to the grace and mercy of God for help. They are willing to submit to His will, to be willing to accept whatever He says, to be completely in His hands. To be "poor in spirit" is the direct opposite to self pride, vanity, and ambition for self.

Many of the false teachers are teaching that in order to obtain happiness is to have self respect, to obtain honor, or riches, or fame, but Jesus taught otherwise. It is only those who realize their sinful, helpless condition, and turn to Christ and depend upon Him for help that can find true happiness. Those who are "poor in spirit" are the ones "that mourn" (v. 4). They are the ones who, "are the meek" (v. 5), the ones who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (v. 6). These are the ones who receive the blessings of God. "their is the kingdom of

heaven." They "shall be comforted." They "shall inherit the earth." They shall be filled with the righteousness for which they hunger.

We have a good example of ones whom God blesses found in Luke 18, in the parable of the two men who went up into the temple to pray. One who depended upon his own self righteousness boasted to God of his own goodness. It is said of the other, "...the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13, 14).

PAUL

(Continued from Page 3)

Some of these days there is going to come a world convulsion whereby God is going to shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, to the extent that all the nations of the world shall feel the very power of God. Then it is that the desire of all nations shall come. Who is the "desire of all nations"? Beloved, you know as well as I that the prophet is speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, and when the Son of God comes, He is going to take that temple at Jerusalem, and He is going to literally fill that house with His glory.

When the tabernacle was built according to the pattern that God showed to Moses in the mountain, it is said that the glory of God came down and filled that tabernacle completely. Then when Solomon built the temple, there was a repetition, in that the Spirit of God took up His residence within that temple. However, Ezekiel tells us how he saw the Spirit of the Lord take His departure from the temple at Jerusalem, and from that time down to this, the Jewish place of worship has never shown forth the glory of God. There is a day coming when "the desire of all nations" shall return, and when the Son of God puts in His appearance, it is then that the whole temple is going to be filled with the glory of the Lord.

You will be amazed, as you read through the Word of God, to see how much is said about glorifying God. When the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, it was on that night that an angel said to the shepherds: "...Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11).

Then the Word of God tells us how an entire multitude of the heavenly host joined that first angel in praising God, and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

This would show us that even on the night when the Son of

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The Baptist Examiner Forum II

SUBMIT QUESTIONS ON ANY BIBLE SUBJECT
THE BAPTIST EXAMINER--P.O. BOX 60--ASHLAND, KENTUCKY 41105-0060

What is synagogue of Satan? (Rev. 3:9) Are pastors of such men of God or ministers of Satan?

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The word synagogue is a Jewish word that came into use during the time of the exile. A synagogue was used since the temple was no longer available. It means congregation and was a recognized place of worship for the reading and studying of the law, and other customs around which Jewish life revolved. It is still the center of the Jewish faith today.

When the Church was started during the time of Christ, there were those Jews that held on to the synagogue idea and opposed the idea of any other gathering place for worship. It is this group that the devil used to persecute the early followers of Christ. They are referred to as the "synagogue of Satan" twice in the New Testament. These people are opposed to the work and Word of God and seek to return to the foundations laid in the Old Testament concerning promises and the law. John, the Revelator, focuses on these "synagogues of Satan" as he writes to the seven churches of Asia. "Synagogue of Satan" means congregation of the devil.

Beginning with chapter two and the church at Ephesus, John addresses each church for its good points as well as its failures. He mentions five churches of God in a negative manner. The churches at Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea each received words of correction for their failures. Two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, received praises and had nothing negative said about them. It was these two churches that received the attention of the devil. "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which save they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:8-9). These people said that they were Jews, God says that they were not Jews, but were actually followers of Satan. God does not specifically tell us what the blasphemy was, but we know that any blasphemy is speaking evil of God.

John also writes unto the church at Philadelphia concerning this same matter. "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come

and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (Rev 3:9). Notice again, that these people say that they are Jews, but God says that they are not Jews. The people of the church at Philadelphia kept the Word of God, and they had not denied the name of God. Those that were of the synagogue of Satan were just the opposite. They may have been Jews outwardly, but they were not Jews inwardly. There is a great difference between those that appear to be Jews, and those that really are. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:28-29).

Those that were of the "synagogue of Satan" apparently made up a part of the body of the church. This has not ceased because there are those today that are in the church, but oppose the ministry of the church and in many ways hinder the unity of the church. If there be a separate group of people that today stand in opposition to the mission of the church, then, they, as well as those that lead them are of the "synagogue of Satan". The identification that will enable to mark these kinds of people are the same that made it possible to identify those that said they were Jews and were not. They persecute Christians; they blaspheme the causes of Christ.

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The "Synagogue of Satan" is the meeting place for the followers of Satan. Satan has followers and workers. He has ministers. These ministers appear as the ministers of righteousness. Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. So these false teachers and preachers of Satan appear as ministers of God so that they might lead men astray.

A Synagogue is a meeting place. It was a meeting place for the Pharisees to meet in the days of Christ on the earth. It was supposed to be a meeting place for God's people. The people who were supposed to be representing God during the days of our Lord here on earth. I am not sure but what this is what the Scripture refers to in this place. But, though it seems, it is referring to men who have come from the meeting place or gathering of

Satan's followers and have infiltrated the church of Jesus Christ. They have and are presently as Jude says in verse four, "crept in unawares".

Verse nine of chapter two and verse nine of chapter three of Revelation is speaking of some people who claim to be Christians and are not. These people are from among Satan's followers and have entered into the assembly of the saints for the purpose of disrupting the worship service of God. Satan has always tried to interfere with the work of God. This is what he was doing in the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia.

There is one thing in particular that we can be sure of; that is that Jesus knew where Satan's seat was and He knows where Satan's synagogue is. And we can be sure that God knows where Satan's workers are today. None will escape the all-seeing eye of God.

Every church that does not belong to Christ will be destroyed. For the Scriptures tell us, "But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." (Matthew 15:13).

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What is synagogue of Satan?

A synagogue was in Christ's day, a house of worship for the Jews. In fact, they (the Jews) still worship in their synagogue. The synagogue became a place of worship after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

The synagogue of Satan would be a house of worship by those who deny the truth of God and His Word. I am sure that the so-called church that was founded some time back by Satan worshippers is a synagogue of Satan because they openly declare that that is their purpose.

In my opinion any church that did not spring from the church started by Jesus Christ Himself in His earthly ministry recorded in Matthew 16:18 is a synagogue of Satan because if Christ did not start them then Satan led someone to start them to oppose the one Jesus started to confuse the true one. And if Satan started them, they will not preach the truth. They will not defend the Word of God. They will not preach Christ, and Him crucified. They will not preach the blood atonement. They will not preach the sovereignty of God, but rather place God on the level with man, that He (God) is trying to save the whole world but is helpless to do so without man's help.

Satan has been starting churches down through the ages; in fact, since Christ started the first one. Satan is an imitator, and since the time he made the statement that he would be like the Most High as stated in Isaiah 14:14, has tried to copy God. He has led men to start imitation churches, imitation Bibles and many other things, such as in the plagues of Moses's time.

Are pastors of such churches ministers of Satan? If they continue teaching false doctrine, and preaching in false churches, what else could you conclude?

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"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thes. 1:7, 8).

The synagogue of Satan is referring to those organizations that preach a false gospel, those that Paul pronounced a curse upon (Gal. 1:8, 9). They are lead by those false teachers that Peter referred to in II Peter chapter two "...as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed..." It is false religion and their ministers that will meet the vengeance of Almighty God! John saw this judgment and heard a "great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand" (Rev. 19:1, 2).

Those groups that preach another gospel are the synagogue of the adversary, and their leaders are ministers of Satan. God's vengeance awaits them.

PAUL

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God was born in Bethlehem as the angels sang that hallelujah chorus, it was then that the thought of the glory of God was paramount in the mind of the angels of the Lord.

The Word of God tells us how important it is that we remember everything is to be for the glory of God. Listen: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

As I have said, you have no business drawing a breath into your lungs, you have no business to lift a glass of water to your lips to quench your thirst, you have no business to take a sandwich into your hands except it be for the glory of the Lord. I say to you, when you turn through the Word of God you will be amazed

that everything we do, and every action on our part is to be that God Himself might be glorified.

I. Christ is to be completely glorified.

The Word of God tells us how that some of these days the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be completely glorified. We read: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

If you will read the preceding verses you will see that Paul is delving into the knowledge that God has given to him of the riches, and the wisdom, and the grace of God. When he completes his study of the wisdom and the knowledge and the grace of God, he cries then to say, "...to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Notice again: "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (II Tim. 4:18).

This is the last book that Paul wrote. He is finishing out his life's ministry. He knows within a little while that he is going out into eternity to be with the Lord. As he writes his last words he says, "The Lord is going to take care of me. He is going to deliver me from every evil work, and is going to preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom." Then with a shout of triumph he says, "...to whom be glory for ever and ever."

The Apostle Peter said: "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (I Pet. 1:11).

Go back to Calvary and see Him suffer. Go back beyond that to Gethsemane and see Him as He suffered. Go back to the very beginning of His ministry and see the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ as you trace His life through this world. Beloved, the Scriptures tell us that as He suffered, so glory shall follow. I tell you, some of these days the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be completely glorified.

We read: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

This is the story of the four and twenty elders who fell down before our Lord and praised Him, and who said, "You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power."

When the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world He didn't come to be glorified. He came at that time to be crucified. There was a time when the Son of God had only one thought in mind -- namely, He was to die for the sins of His people. That was fulfilled at His first advent. Now that the Son of God has gone from this world, we are waiting for one more glorious experience, which is that blessed day when Jesus Christ shall be completely glorified.

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THE BIBLE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

by Elder Willard Pyle

"And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out" (Luke 4:36). "And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written" (Luke 4:17). "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

There is an alarming condition among Baptists today, as there is more talking about the Bible than there is reading the Bible. There is more checking the Bible to see if it is true than believing what it says; more of treasuring the opinions of men than properly evaluating the "Thus saith the Lord."

Many times we will get up to preach and say "Spurgeon says," like that's authority. I value my brethren in the ministry who have gone on before, but there is a far greater resource than the opinion of any man, regardless of whom he may be. There is more time spent in telling God what He meant than in letting God tell us what He meant. Brethren, we are weighed in the balances and found wanting in this regard. May the God of all grace revive a deep appreciation in this audience for the Word of God. The purpose of my message is that God will get us back to reading, meditating, and studying the Word of God. Instead of getting up in the morning and turning on the TV to learn the news, or saying "Where is the newspaper?" we need to begin the day with the God of heaven. How many of you have read the Bible outside of the Bible conference since you have been here?

God gave the Word. What kind of a word did He give? Jesus opened the Book. What kind of book did He open? God said, "John, you write in a book what I give." What kind of book did God have John write on the Isle of Patmos?

I. I have tried to find a word which would summarize the characteristics of the Bible and I find that words are inadequate. There is not a word that can properly evaluate the Bible in the English language. You just cannot find words great enough to describe the Bible, therefore my first thought is "What a Word is this!" It is indescribable. Isaiah 40:25 says, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One."

If we cannot find anything or anyone to compare with God, where can we find something that will help us to evaluate the Word of God; if we cannot describe that Book which He gave? The Bible really is indescribable in its beauty and its greatness. We need to realize that the Bible is so marvelous and wonderful, so deep and mighty that we cannot begin to evaluate what it is all about. We need to see the greatness and magnitude of God's Word. We need to learn to reverence the

Word of God. There is no proper reverence of God unless you reverence the Book that He gave. If you do not bow before this Book, not to worship the Bible as such, but to reverence it because it is God's Word—if you do not worship God's Word as you come to His Book, then you just don't worship Him at all.

When they read the Word of God in the Old Testament, they stood up in reverence. We take the Word of God too lightly today. We have Bibles in our homes, motels, and all over this country, but it is not revered for what it really is. We need to respect the Word of God; it is indescribable in its glory.

II. When we think about the Bible being indescribable, I would remind you, we have an infinite Book. The Word of God is not the product of puny men. The Book we have is an infinite Book.

In I Peter 1:21 we read: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

We have a Book that is all-wise, all powerful God-sent unto us. It is far more reaching than we realize. It is a divine record which cannot be understood by human logic or reasoning.

In I Corinthians 2:12 is a familiar passage that I trust you know. "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."

God gave the Holy Spirit for one reason in connection with this, and that is that He might guide us into all truth.

The Bible is super-human. We cannot put our minds up against it and hope to figure out how it goes together. Only God's Spirit can give you the capacity to rightly divide the Word of truth. The reason we don't rightly divide it most times is because we depend upon our ability to get things 1-2-3, A-B-C, and we don't turn to the Spirit of God to find out what He has to say about the matter.

Paul goes on to say: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13).

There is not a man in this world wise enough to teach us the things of God. However, the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. When I come to this Book, I come realizing that it is infinite. I come realizing that regardless of how much schooling I may have had, I cannot discern this book by myself. No amount of Greek, Hebrew, or study will help me understand the Bible unless it is impressed by the Word of God. We ought to know Greek and Hebrew if God providentially gives us the opportunity, but we still need the Spirit of God to teach us the Word of God. Never get away from that fact. That is the reason our seminaries and schools are so full of corruption. They have gotten smarter than God; they have turned away from dependence on the Word of God.

Yes, we have the verbally inspired Word of God. It is indescribable and it is infinite, be-

cause it is inspired by the Spirit of God.

III. It is a predestinated Book. It was given by Almighty God. God predetermined what to put in this Book before He ever raised up a man to pen His Word. God had already decided before man came into the world what would, and would not, be in this Book. I don't have to worry about whether it is acceptable in the twentieth century, I know that God had it planned before there was a first century, or any other time existed. This is God's Book. He predetermined what to put in it, and that is why we are to preach all of the counsel of God. He knows what men need better than we do ourselves. We need to preach all of it because somewhere, sometime, all of it is valuable for people in this world. I cannot discern whether a man is strong enough to receive this or that, so I am to preach in love and compassion all of the Word of God and let God apply it to the sheep if they need it, and when they need it, and how they need it. I depend (or should) on the Holy Spirit. He can feed you better than I can.

Now I am to feed the church of God which He purchased, but I do that as I preach the Word by the direction of the Holy Spirit, and He must apply that message as it is given.

IV. So we have an infallible Book. It is such, for we read in Psalms 19:7: "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."

We do not have an infallible church, preacher, or deacon but we do have an infallible record that pastor, deacon and all the members can depend on. When God says "Do this," that is infallible. We don't have to worry about whether it is right or not. It will stand the test. I thank God that the church I pastor does not have to depend upon me to be perfect. I am not infallible, but I have a Book and God that are. We have the infallible record of God. God is not a God of mistakes or contradictions. When you say that His Book has one contradiction in it, you make God a liar. You say that God made a mistake and that takes God off His throne. You don't have a God anymore if you believe that. I don't believe we have a Book of men; I believe it is God's Book. We have not only an infallible Book; we have an irresistible one.

I read in Isaiah 55 that precious passage that reminds me of the infallibility of the Word of God: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

V. It is irresistible. When one preaches the Bible, he is preaching the greatest force in this world. Men cannot run fast enough, or far enough to get away from the Word of God. It tracks men down. It is irresistible as it goes forth by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what it says in Ephesians 6:17: "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Why is it irresistible? Because

it is willed by the Holy Spirit. God is irresistible and when He takes His Word by the Holy Spirit He can operate on the lives or hearts of men. He is irresistible, and so is His Word. It goes forth with power and ability. The Bible is able to make men wise unto salvation. Why is it able to do that? Because it is irresistible. Men are made wise unto salvation by the Word of God.

In I Thessalonians 2:13 we read: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

Because it is irresistible, it works in men just like yeast works in a loaf of bread. God's Word works effectually in the hearts of men. He works in us, both to will and to do His good pleasure. The Word of God is effectual when the power of the Holy Spirit is present.

Paul describes this great Word in II Thessalonians 2:14: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He chose me, I didn't do the choosing. He also did the calling. How does He call? He calls you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the Word of God is effectual.

When Jesus stood at the graveside of Lazarus, He said, "Lazarus, come forth." Jesus did not cross His fingers and say, "Oh, I hope My words will have effect, I just hope he will be able to come out of there." That is what you are implying when you say the Word of God isn't strong enough to do what God gave it to do. It is irresistible. Lazarus had to come out because God quickened him and made him alive, and he came out at the call of God.

When He said, "Saul, Saul," you didn't see Saul going on down the road. You don't find Saul saying, "Well, I think maybe I will wait until tomorrow." You find him effectually called by the power of God.

VI. Also we have an indestructible Book.

"But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (I Peter 1:25).

Sometimes sound Baptist preachers give the implication that this is not true. We sometimes say that God inspired the Bible in the Greek and imply that we no longer have an inspired Word. The words in italics in the King James Version are not inspired, but I believe that somewhere in this world there is a totally inspired record that God gave. If God isn't strong enough to keep His Word in this world, without men tearing it to pieces, He is not strong enough to inspire it to begin with. I don't know about all these translations, but I know somewhere there is an inspired Word of God that He gave. He told us that it would endure forever. It is in this world.

We talk about the church being in this world because God said it would not pass out of existence. I believe His Book is in this

world. It will not fade out of existence.

VII. In John 6:63, we have another wonderful characteristic of the Bible.

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

This tells us how valuable the flesh is: it profiteth nothing. That is what we profit in ourselves. If you want to evaluate yourself, just put down a zero. If you want something valuable, turn away from the flesh to the Word of God. If you want something that will make you have vim, vigor, and vitality, turn away from the medicine cabinet and get into the Word of God. That will help you. It is spirit and it is truth. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

VIII. Beloved, I tell you what another characteristic of the Bible is, it's absolutely true. Sometimes in court, the lawyer will get up and twist things around that you say, and it isn't the truth because he perverted it. I'll tell you one thing that is always the truth, and that is the Word of God. You can believe it anytime; it is absolute truth.

We like to hear that we are predestinated unto salvation, but we don't like to hear messages where it is said we are predestinated unto good works. How we love to think that before the foundation of the world, God chose us in Christ Jesus. He chose us unto salvation. We say, "That's the truth, Brother! Preach on!" and everyone gets all enthused in the congregation, and they jump almost ten feet high. However, when the preacher says, "You need to do this because God says so," somehow all the enthusiasm is gone.

Proverbs 30:5 says that every Word of God is pure. You can drink all you want to. It won't hurt you. Some people act like it is contaminated. They pick through, and act like they are afraid they are going to get a germ on them.

We find in Psalm 119:105 that it says, the Word is a light and a lamp. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

We are having light trouble at our home. I went in the bathroom and turned the light on and it flickered, and I could see a little, and I started shaving, and then I couldn't see my face. The light just kept blinking; I couldn't depend on it. But I'll tell you one light that you can depend on. It won't flicker. Just turn it on, and it will guide you. It is a light and a lamp and you don't have to worry about it.

The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword. It is a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces. The Word of God is a fire; it is a precious seed.

IX. I close by saying that we have an irrevocable Book.

It will not change. I want you to understand that. This is the reason we hear the writer say: "...I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job. 23:12).

Oh, what a Book we have! Hallelujah for the Book of God. You ought to thank God that you have the greatest Book in all this world.

PAUL

(Continued from Page 5)

II. Christ is Going to Bring His Saints Into Glory. At the same time that Christ is glorified, He is going to likewise bring His saints into glory with Him. Listen: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

This is a part of the high priestly prayer of intercession that was prayed by the Lord Jesus Christ near the end of His ministry, and as He prays He thinks of His own, and He prays that we might behold Him, and that we might see Him in His glory. Beloved, doesn't it help you and bless your heart to know that as Jesus Christ is going to be completely glorified, so He is likewise going to bring you and me and all the balance of the saints of God into a state of glorification?

Notice again: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

How many times in life you sit and think about the problems and the sufferings that you have! How many times you remember the aches and the pains that you have physically, and you realize your inability to cope with the problems of this world! How many times you have thought of the sufferings through which you are passing, but Paul said, in substance, after you have calculated this, then calculate on the other hand all the glory that is going to be ours after awhile in Jesus Christ, and just remember that by a mathematical calculation the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to that glory that shall be revealed then.

Beloved, I am glad to know that some of these days the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be glorified, but the thing that blesses my heart is to know that you and I who are saints of God are going to share in that glory, and we are going to enjoy the glory of God together with Him.

Listen again: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4).

I ask, who wouldn't like to appear with a president? Who wouldn't like to appear with a king? Who wouldn't like to appear with a governor? Who wouldn't like to appear with some of the greatest of this earth? Well, some of these days I am not going to appear with a governor, nor with a king, nor with a president, nor with the earth's greatest, but I am going to appear with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is going to be completely glorified, and at that day, He is going to bring the saints of God into glory.

Paul says: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10).

This tells us that many sons are going to be brought into glory. Beloved, God isn't going to save everybody. God isn't trying to save everybody. Rather, God is going to save many sons - His elect - and those whom He saves, He is going to bring into glory with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. What We are Not to Glory in.

My text says, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Now if we are to glory in the cross of Christ while we are waiting for that glorious day wherein we and Christ shall be glorified together, what is it that we are not to glory in now? Well, I'd say that there are a lot of things that men ordinarily glory in that we certainly are not to glory in today as Christians.

Surely the world glories in physical prowess. I often think about the folk who participate in sports of various kinds - how that they glory in their physical strength, in that one man is able to compete with another and successfully win in some particular sport. Such a man is looked upon as truly great so far as this world is concerned. Even Solomon said: "The glory of young men is their strength..." (Prov. 20:29).

Surely baseball players and boxers and wrestlers and athletes of all kinds glory in their strength, but, beloved, we are not to glory in physical prowess.

Neither are we to glory in wealth. How many people there are today who glory in the fact that they have a little more of what this world has to offer than what is possessed by their neighbors. But, beloved, we are not to glory in our wealth. Listen: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth..." (Deut. 8:18).

Yes, beloved, if you have any of this world's goods it is because God has given you the power to get it. You don't have wealth because of anything in yourself. The glory does not belong to you, for it is God that has given you the power whereby you are able to get that wealth.

There was a church in the New Testament that needed to be reminded of this, for we read: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

This has reference to the church at Laodicea. This church was lukewarm. They had gone on record that they were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, yet the Lord looked down upon them and said, "Don't you know that I look upon you as wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked? You think you are rich, but I see you entirely different from the way in which you see yourself."

Yes, beloved, we are prone to glory in our physical prowess, and we are prone to glory in our wealth, but we are not, in the light of this text, to glory in these.

Neither are we to glory in any religious experience on our part. The Lord Jesus said: "Therefore when thou doest thine

alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Mt. 6:2).

I think there are lots of people today who are just like these individuals of the days of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave alms, to be seen of man, and who were seen of men and received the glory of men. I think there are lots of folk today who have some kind of religious experience that they glory in. There are folk who glory in their mourner's bench. There are folk who glory in their church membership. There are folk who glory in the fact that they have been baptized. If you were to ask one of these individuals about his experience, he would give you lots of praise for his experience. He might praise the mourner's bench, or he might praise the baptistry, or he might praise his church membership. Beloved, we are not to glory in our religious experience, for my text says, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Some people glory in their oratorical ability. There was a man in the New Testament who did that, and he came to a very sad end. Listen: "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:21-23).

Stand there beside that casket and see Herod as his worm-infested body lies before you, and you can realize this truth, that he is in this position just because he took the glory that belonged to God. His oratory was looked upon as being the voice of God, and when he gloried in his oratory, God took him in death.

We are not to glory in the things of this world. Each of us are affiliated with the world in some respect, and it is so easy for us to come to the place that we would glory in earthly accomplishments and earthly experiences. Paul dealt with a group of people of whom this was true, for he said: "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things)" (Phil. 3:17-19).

These were people who were concerned about worldly things - who lived for this world, and Paul said that their glory was their shame. I tell you, beloved, we are not to glory in worldly experiences.

There is a reason why we are not to glory in physical prowess, and in wealth, and in religious experiences, and in oratory, and in worldly things. That reason is that all man's glory is of a transient nature. Beloved, it doesn't

last; it is only for a little while and passes away. Listen: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away" (1 Pet. 1:24).

All the glory that men have by way of wealth, by way of physical prowess, by way of oratory, by way of their earthly accomplishments, and by way of their worldly connections - all the glory that may come to a man amounts to nothing because the Word of God tells us that so far as man is concerned he is just like the grass. "...The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away," and the glory of man which is as the flower of the ground or the grass of the earth perishes away.

I never had anything brought any more forcibly to my attention than this thought of recent date. There was a plane crash involving a man that lived in this area. It so happened that the pilot of that plane was in a store just a few days before the crash, and a godly woman was inviting folk in the store to go to church. When she asked him if he would attend services, he said, "Now listen, I am a young man. I am under fifty years of age, and I have a lot of living to do yet. I have a lot of fishing and hunting to do. I have a lot of things in this world that I am going to live for." He said, "You go around here and talk to some of these old people and you invite them because they are just about to the end of the way; but so far as I am concerned, I have a lot of living to do yet in this world."

Beloved, I have thought of it so many times since he was taken in death. Here was a man who thought he had lots of living to do, who expected to do a lot of hunting, who planned to do a lot of fishing, and who was too busy to go to the house of God. I thought how that the glory of man is so transient - how it lasts for so short a time. As Peter said, the glory of man is as the flower of grass, which perisheth away. Yes, beloved, we are not to glory in these things, because they only last such a little while.

IV. What It Is We Are To Glory In.

We are to glory in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, for Paul said, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Every one of us who are saved are crucified people. Every one of us who are saved have already experienced a crucifixion ourselves Paul says, "...by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." I am crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto me. The day you were saved, you were born into the family of God, and you were born crucified. Actually, you were born into the kingdom of God as a crucified individual. You are dead to this world, it is just a crucified one, a dying one, who is trying to live in the world. Paul says, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ..."

I ask you, beloved, would you glory in your physical prowess, or in your abilities so far as this world is concerned? Would you glory in the wealth that you have? Would you glory in your

religious experiences? Nay; we are to glory only in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I say "cross," I don't mean the piece of wood, but rather the cross is symbolic or emblematic of the death of Jesus. For what purpose do we sing about the blood of the Son of God? The blood is to remind us of the fact that He died for us and also the cross is to remind us of the fact that He died for us.

We are so prone to glory in other things. We are so prone to want to glory in the things that we have. We are so prone to want to glory in our accomplishments. We are so prone to want to glory in the things of this world. But a Christian, above all else, is to glory in the death of Jesus Christ, whereby that we are born crucified into this world.

V. To Glory In The Cross Of Christ Is a Transforming Experience

We read: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18).

Paul says that the more you see of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, the more it reflects upon you. They say that the longer husbands and wives live together, the more like each other they become. I don't know whether that be true, but it has often been said, and I think in all probability there is some truth in it. Beloved, I now it is true spiritually, that the more we live with Jesus - the more we look upon His glory - the more we ourselves are transformed into the same image, from glory, to glory. We see Him in His glory and that glory is reflected in us, to the extent that as we glory in the cross of Christ; it has a transforming effect upon the lives of every one of us.

Then I look at myself, I think how little I must have looked to Christ. I look at myself and realize how little of my time I have spent reflecting upon Him. My brother, my sister, would to God that beginning tomorrow you might go out to glory in the cross of Christ. As you do, there shall be a reflection of that glory in your life. Others in turn will see the glory of God in your life, coming into your life as a reflection from the Christ in whom you glory.

IV. We Are To Glorify Him Through His Church

We are to glorify Christ primarily through His church. Listen: "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

Notice, beloved, Christ is to get His glory in His church.

I just don't believe that any child of God that is truly saved is going to be happy outside the church. Some of these days Jesus is coming. When He comes, no saved individual would want Him to come and find him outside His church. Beloved, I want to be a part of the bride of Christ if it might please Him. Whether it pleases Him that I be a part of His bride or not, I know one thing, I surely wouldn't be a part of His bride if I am not even affiliated with His church.

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He is to get His glory through His church -- not through a mission board, not through any organization, and not through any kind of a worldly set-up that bypasses the church. I want to glorify Him, and I want to give God the glory through my life right now. For my text says, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." I say, "Thank you, Lord, for reminding me of the fact that I am to glory in your cross, and that I am to give God the glory through the church that Jesus built and established here within this world."

CONCLUSION: In closing, I ask, are you a member of that church? Are you a member of that church that the Lord Jesus Christ built? Then if you are, you can glory in the cross of Christ in His church. If you are not, your glory at best is but a most feeble reflection of what it ought to be.

Might it please God to help you to look up to Calvary and see Jesus who died there for your sins, and might you go out tomorrow to glory in that cross; and as you glory in that cross, may you tell people about your church, that the glory of God might be through the church of which you are member.

May God bless you!

FINDING

(Continued from Page 1)

when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:6-15).

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to make some important decision in your life? You struggled to know what to do. You searched and prayed for answers. I'm sure all of us have been in similar circumstances as these. If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you. He is with you to lead and guide you into God's perfect will. We read in the Scripture about Paul's personal testimony. Here was a blaspheming, persecuting, Christian-hating man who was changed into one who loved God and went on to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul came to understand and obey the truth that he once hated.

When a person gets saved God opens his understanding to see

the truth. Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The reason some never see the truth is simply that they refuse to obey God's will. In fact, obeying the will of God is the very first prerequisite to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

If you refuse Christ you are in rebellion against the will of God! If you refuse to do the will of God as it is revealed in His Word, you are committing iniquity. Again, Jesus will say to that vast number on judgment day, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." What is iniquity, the same thing as sin? Iniquity is rebellion against God's authority. Iniquity is when I choose to defy a sovereign God by choosing my own desire rather than conforming to His will. Iniquity is passed on from generation to generation. God says that he visits the "iniquity of the fathers upon the children,... unto the third and fourth generation." Sinful habits and evil tendencies get passed on from fathers to sons. Iniquity is the rebellion in the heart, and sin is simply the acting out of that rebellion. If I am going to do the will of God I must first repent of iniquity and come to Christ to save my soul from sin. Then and only then can I do the will of God from my heart.

When Saul of Tarsus was saved, God told a man named Ananias to go and baptize him. Ananias instructed Paul in the things of God. He told Saul, "God has chosen you to know his will." I believe this one statement applies to all who know Christ. God has chosen us unto salvation; but not only that, He has chosen us to know his will. The usual experience of God's people will be that when they are obedient to what God tells them, the Lord will open doors and make His way plain to them.

Do you recall Abraham's servant? Abraham instructed this servant to journey and search out a wife for his son Isaac. He made this servant swear a solemn oath that he would carry out his orders to every detail. The servant prayed for guidance as he journeyed off to a far land. He came to the house of Bethuel. God answered his prayer as he found the very woman God had for Isaac. This servant could see the hand of God in the whole matter. The servant explained it this way: "...I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren." He found the will of God because he obeyed what God told him to do.

You see, if you are willing to obey the Lord in what He has revealed to you in His Word, you won't have much of a problem discovering what He wants you to do. God shows His will to those who seek and serve Him.

Often He will make our circumstances to coincide with what He wants for us. Spiritually lazy folks have a hard time knowing God's will; but the usual experience for the obedient Christian is that when he is living faithful to the Lord, He will be led by the Lord. When you put the Lord first, he will put your interests first. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:8, 10).

Look closely at verse 14 of our text: God chose Paul "to know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth." The word "see" means to behold the outward form.

Ananias told him, "Saul, it's God's will for you to see Jesus Christ."

Dear friends, that is a wonderful thought! One day every blood washed child of God will see the dear Saviour. This is the will of God. Our Lord and Saviour prayed to this end. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). This ought to spur each of us to keep faithful to Christ. Not only is it His will for us to see the just One, but also it is His will for us to hear Him.

Throughout history God has manifested His presence and spoken to His elect in many unique ways. I think of how God spoke to Adam in an audible voice. God spoke to Moses in the midst of a burning bush. God spoke to Elijah in the wind and fire in a still small voice. God spoke to Joseph in a dream. God spoke through His prophets and apostles.

God now speaks to men through His Son. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. 1:1-2). The Bible says that "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed..." How does Christ speak to us today? He speaks through His Word, the Bible! "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16-17). The most effective way to find the will of God in anything is through careful searching and meditating on the Holy Scriptures. Now friend, the Bible is not a magic book. I have heard of folks searching for God's will by taking their Bible and randomly flipping it open to see what passage their finger lands on. That is very foolish. It reminds me of one fellow who was very depressed. He desperately wanted to know God's will for his life. He prayed, "Lord, what will you have me do?" He closed his eyes and flipped open his Bible at ran-

dom and said, "Wherever my finger lands, that is what I will do." His finger landed on the Scripture Matt. 27:5 which reads, "And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself."

I have discovered one indispensable principle in obtaining the clear leading of the Lord. When God makes known to me my duty in His Word, I must obey what he says without hesitation. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). I do not have to pray or wonder if I am supposed to do what He has already revealed in His Word. I must do all He commands me. If I refuse to obey clear light, then I cannot be in the center of His will. As I read the Scriptures I see some clear cut areas that are definitely the will of God for me.

Permit me to share a few of these with you: First, it is God's will for you to be a part of one of the Lord's true churches. The first step of obedience for a new Christian is to follow the Lord in scriptural baptism and become part of the Lord's church. I cannot believe that our Lord will lead His people into these false churches (even some so-called Baptists) who practice open communion, or who do not teach the whole counsel of God. You may think that God led you to such places, but I suspect that you chose such a church according to the desires of your flesh rather than the leading of the Lord. Friends, the Lord never leads us to do anything contrary to what He has revealed in His Word. The Bible teaches us that it is the will of God for His people to be under the sound instruction of the Word of God.

Paul wrote of a man named Epaphras who was a pastor of the church of Colosse. Listen to what he said of his man: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis" (Col. 4:12-13). Here we see the man of God laboring zealously in word, doctrine, and prayer that God's people would stand "complete in the will of God."

If you refuse to hear one of God's called servants, if you refuse to be identified with one of the Lord's true New Testament churches; I cannot believe that you are in the will of God. You cannot prosper spiritually. I will not say that you are not saved. Salvation is not in the church or in any man. Salvation is in Christ and Him alone. I will say that you will be greatly stunted in your spiritual life if you neglect the means of growth.

Secondly, it is God's will for you to abstain from sin. "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (I Thess. 4:3). Now the world will tell you that sex is all right outside of the marriage bond. I have heard even some professed Christians say

that it's all right for men and women to live together outside of marriage. God's Word tells us that it is sin! God tells us to abstain from such sins. Certainly God knows what is best for us. He knows what would harm and destroy our lives. God's Word warns us of the consequences of being caught up in such sin. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray" (Prov. 5:22-23). Sin is always appealing at the time you indulge in it, but oh the terrible consequences that it brings!

Thirdly, it is God's will for us to refuse to be conformed to this world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (I John 2:15-17). You cannot have God's leading in your life as long as you are worldly in your outlook and activities. If you love the things of this world your heart is not on things above. Now beloved, this world is passing away. All the glory and material possessions are going to burn up one day. Why do we spend most of our time and energy in pleasing our flesh while the things of the Lord are put in the background? Are we guilty of committing spiritual adultery? Listen to what James says: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Those are some pretty cutting words, are they not? Spiritual adultery is loving this world more than the Lord. It is following the worldly crowd and turning your back on God's people. Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:18-20). There is one thing that I have surely found out. When I confess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and live a separated life for Him, this world has not liked me very well. The only thing this world has done is tried to drag me down. By and large this old world is going to persecute and ridicule those who live godly in Christ Jesus. But Bless God, "he that doeth the will of God abideth forever!" That is God's promise!

Fourthly, It is the will of God for us to give thanks for everything. "In everything give

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FINDING

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thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thess. 5:18). This is not some optional spiritual exercise for me to perform. It is God's will for me to give Him praise and thanksgiving. When I thank God for everything, I am recognizing His absolute sovereignty over my life. This is not always an easy thing to do, especially when I have to endure some trying and painful thing. Yet I know that "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Praise and thanksgiving is worship in its highest form. God delights to hear us say, "Thank you Father, I know you are sovereign; I know that everything is working out for my best interests." When you adopt the thankful heart, your worship will be free and sweet! Truly we have much to be thankful for. We who are saved have Christ as our Saviour and friend. We can say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." We have a glorious future. We are going to spend eternity in a place called heaven.

Dear friend, are you seeking the will of God for your life? First of all are you being obedient to what God has already clearly revealed to you in His Word? God will honor your faithful obedience to Him. By and by He will work everything out in His providence so that His will shall be clear to you. You will be tempted to take the easy way out. Friend, don't do that. The path of least resistance is usually not the way God leads His people. It is through the difficulties and problems that you will become strong. Wait upon the Lord and you will have His best. He blesses all who wait patiently upon Him. "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength..."

WHAT WAS

(Continued from Page 1)

Before Bethlehem Jesus Christ was a participant in the blessed and holy covenant of sovereign and saving grace. As we look back into the halls of eternity we see the triune God of the Bible in council with Himself. This council consisted of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. At this council they are discussing the eternal destiny of fallen man. For, in the purpose of God a once upright man is now sinful. The Father chooses a great number of these people for Himself. But His holiness demands He be separated from them and His judgment demands that their sins be punished. Therefore the Son said, I will die for them. He, in the purpose of God, said I will atone for their sins. Jesus Christ truly was, "...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

Before Bethlehem Jesus Christ created the heavens and the earth. Before there was a Bethlehem there was Christ. Before there was a tree for Him to be crucified upon there was Christ. John 1:3 says, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." If there had not been a Christ before Bethlehem there would not be a Bethlehem. For, Jesus Christ created the earth that Bethlehem sits upon at this very hour.

Christ not only created the heavens and the earth, but was and is upholding them by the word of His power. The reason the planets do not collide with each other, the reason the sun does not burn the earth into total annihilation, the reason we do not float off into outer space, is because Jesus Christ upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3).

Before Bethlehem Jesus Christ was appearing on earth. During these appearances He did not join Himself with a human nature but merely appeared as a man. Many in number are the times of Christ's appearances before Bethlehem. To establish my dogma, I therefore shall only name a few.

In the book of Genesis chapter 16 there is a story told about an Egyptian woman named Hagar. She was the handmaid of Sarai, Abram's wife. Sarai could not have children, so she told Abram to take her handmaid to be his wife also, and he did. In the course of time Hagar conceived a child from the seed of Abram. Sarai was very displeased about this action and dealt very harshly with Hagar. Therefore Hagar fled into the wilderness. All alone in the wilderness, no one to protect her, Jesus Christ finds her seated by a fountain of water. "And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seeth me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" (Gen. 16:7, 13). Here Jesus appeared as the angel of the Lord. In these verses the deity of the angel of the Lord is seen very clearly, for it says, "Thou God seeth me." Also, comparing Genesis 17:1, 18, 19 and 20 with Genesis 16:10 one with a very limited amount of brains will conclude that the Almighty God talked with was the same Being Hagar talked with in the previous chapter.

Genesis 22:1-14 tells the story of Abraham being tried by God. He is told to go into the land of Moriah and offer his only son, Isaac, as a burnt-offering on a mountain in that land. Abraham was very obedient to God and did every thing God told him. As Abraham and Isaac were going up the mountain, Isaac questions his father, "...My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:7). Isaac knew what was needed to offer sacrifice to God, but he did not know that he might be that offering. Finally they come to the place God told Abraham of, and there he built an altar and bound up Isaac and laid him upon it. In obedience to God, Abraham was about to offer his only son as a sacrifice to God. With the knife in his hand and Isaac on the altar; what next would take place? As Abraham was about to offer his son he heard the voice of Jesus Christ, "And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I" (Gen. 22:11). Once again the angel of the Lord appeared on the scene. If there was not a Jesus Christ before Bethlehem then there would not have been any one to stay the hand of Abraham.

But, praise God! Jesus Christ has always been, even before Bethlehem.

Exodus 3:2, 3, 4 and 14 says, "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Here Christ appears unto Moses as the "I AM." No one but God could claim this title, the title of being self-existent and self-sufficient. This is the same "I am" of John 8:58 where it says, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Yes, before Bethlehem was the "I am" was, that is Jesus Christ.

Exodus 17:1-7 tells the story of how the people of Israel were very thirsty because they could not find any water in the land of Rephidim. As they began to thirst more and more, they became very angry at Moses for leading them to this place. They were almost ready to stone Moses, but he cried unto the Lord. Once again, Jesus Christ came on the scene. Exodus 17:6 and I. Corinthians 10:4 says, "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel, that Rock was Christ." If there had not been a Jesus Christ before Bethlehem the people of Israel would have died of thirst in the wilderness, but praise God for the appearances of Christ before Bethlehem.

Daniel chapter 3 records another of Christ's appearances that I shall mention. Here the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is told. These three Hebrew boys are commanded by King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down and worship an image made of gold. The three Hebrew boys refuse to bow and worship this image, and this caused the king to become very angry. He then commanded the boys be thrown into a fiery furnace which was to be heated seven times hotter than it had ever been heated before. The furnace was heated, and the boys were then thrown into it. But once again Jesus Christ appears on the scene. He delivered the three Hebrew boys from the fire of the fiery furnace. There was not even the smell of smoke upon them. Praise God for the appearances of Christ, before Bethlehem.

The deity of the angel of the Lord is very clearly seen throughout all of the Old Testament. God has appeared to many many times, and each time He appeared the only one it could have been was Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:3 says, "...and the express image of his person..." Jesus Christ is the only

one that could or can be the express image of God's person.

Beloved, Jesus Christ was doing many great and wonderful works throughout all eternity. He was a comfort for his people, one they could put their trust in. He was there when no one else cared. Jesus Christ was there even before Bethlehem.

STATEMENTS

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than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Sometimes I feel that as I open my mouth all I am doing is changing feet.

Peter's first statement is found in Matthew 14:28. He asked Christ if he could come out of the boat and walk on the water to meet him. This is a very brave idea, but Peter's walk and his talk are not equal. Peter's faith is overcome by fear, and Christ has to save him. Peter did more than any of the other disciples, but it almost cost him everything. Someone said if you count the cost, it is not faith. I believe that it is important that we count the cost so we might ask of God in an intelligent manner. Our faith can be based in part on what we know needs to be done. Then we can study God's Word and see what He has promised to do in these situations. We need to base our faith on what God has said not just on what we think needs to be done. Peter was invited to come, and Christ did not let him down but kept him as He had promised.

Peter's next statement is found in Matthew 15:15. Here he asked for the explanation of a parable. Peter again seems to be taking the place of leadership among the disciples. He is very likely putting into words what the other disciples were thinking. Christ continues to explain that men are evil from within. It is the heart of man that is full of sin and this works its way out rather than sin working its way into the heart. The drunkard does not drink to be evil, but because he is evil he drinks. Today we hear so many reasons for taking a little drink. It will relax you; it is good for your heart and will prevent heart attacks; it will help you sleep. My friend, it is the moderate drinker that one day becomes an alcoholic; and then the problems get so big that he will find them impossible to handle.

Peter's third statement is found in Matthew 16:16. Peter here declares that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is not something that he thought of himself, but was something revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Peter is not alone here. If any man will see that Jesus is indeed the very God it must be revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Most people see Jesus as a man who went about doing good. Hollywood would even show Him as a man who went about helping the people that He lived among. Some see Him as having brought forth through His teaching a great deal of good philosophy to believe. I find this to be a very sad state that these and many cults, such as the Jehovah Witnesses, believe many good things about Christ, but reject Him as being God on the earth. Those in this condition are without hope in their attempt to have eternal life anywhere but in hell. We, like Peter, must see Christ as He is. Notice John

1:14, it states the Word (going back to verse one we find there the Word is God), or God was made flesh and lived with us on this earth. For those who will not accept this, I know the Jehovah Witnesses squirm out of this passage with a misuse of the original Greek, I challenge you to look at a couple of other passages with me. The first is Col. 2:9 "For in him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the God head bodily." That tells me that Christ on this earth was God. Rev. 1:8 (again speaking of Christ), "I am Alpha and Omega the beginning and the ending..." Now I guess these Greek scholars know that Alpha and Omega means exactly what the Bible says that they mean, but they can't relate these words to Christ. They go to Psalms 2 and find where it says that Christ was begotten of God and try to make Him a created being of God. This is not at all the case, Christ being begotten of God in Psalms 2 is referring to the physical birth of Christ on this earth. Another verse I have asked Jehovah Witnesses to explain is found in Zechariah 12. When I asked a couple of them and we used their own Bible, we started in verse one and show how this passage is referring to and speaking of Jehovah. The King James refers to this one creating as The Lord, their book calls this one Jehovah by name. We work our way down to verse 10 showing that the speaker of this passage has not changed and is still Jehovah. Then in verse 10, "...they shall look upon me whom they have pierced..." If you would like to see a Jehovah Witness squirm, ask them to explain when Jehovah was pierced. I want to go to Calvary and see my Savior crucified on an old rugged tree. Oh, how I would like to take the Jehovah Witness with me to that most important of all places that they might also see a Savior that would come and shed His precious blood at Calvary for sinners. I know He went there for me. This statement of Peter's was the most profound and the most important he ever made. If we could only see Christ as Peter did, we would realize the fact that He was the Son of God on this earth.

As we continue studying the sayings of Peter in the book of Matthew, we have covered up to chapter 16 and finished last month with the great statement that was made by Peter in verse 18. The Catholic Church saw fit to use this statement to determine that Peter should be the first Pope. This should ever remind us that one should not base a doctrine on only one verse of Scripture. Had the Catholic Church read a few more verses to the next statement that Peter makes, they may have chosen a different disciple. Notice, the next time Peter speaks is found in Matthew 16:22. Here we find that Christ has stated that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer and be crucified and that He would rise again after the third day. This is to become the very essence of the gospel and Peter who has just proclaimed Him to be the very Christ and Lord now takes the

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ACTS

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ger of being set at "nought," that is, becoming useless. Let me add that there are many businesses in the world today which would become useless if men and women would adhere to the Word of God. All of these businesses, in fact, which feed upon pride, vanity, luxury, vice and the ambitions of men would be made useless.

Demetrius, as we have said, was very concerned that the temple of Diana would be made useless, and I'm glad to say that he was correct. This temple, which was one of the seven wonders of the world, did come to nought. It came to nought even though it took two hundred and twenty years to build it. I'm informed that the temple was four hundred and twenty-five feet long, two hundred and twenty feet wide and that it was supported by one hundred and twenty seven pillars of parian marble, each of which was sixty feet high. Thirty six of the pillars were curiously carved and the remaining ninety one were finely polished. Each pillar, with its base, contained one hundred and fifty tons of marble. The doors and the paneling were made of cypress wood, the roof of cedar and the interior was decorated with gold and by the finest products of the ancient artists. The temple, after suffering various partial demolitions, was finally burned by the Goths, in their third navel invasion in A.D. 260. No one today can determine exactly where the temple was located. That, however, which Demetrius feared, did come true. Thanks to our great God for using the Apostle Paul to help tear down the heathen structure of Diana and for lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ in the city of Ephesus and in that area of the world.

Diana's cheering section, which was made up of the silversmiths, was motivated by anger or wrath. Their voices rang out in the streets of Ephesus with an angry tone as they cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians"! They, by their angry cry, were saying that they would not tolerate any more downgrading of their "great Diana." They also, by their angry cry, were appealing for others to take a stand with them.

"And the whole city was filled with confusion; and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater" (Acts 19:29).

It appeared that the silversmiths had achieved their goal. It appears that all opposition to them would be crushed. They, in a sense of speaking, were running for a touchdown, and would score if they didn't fumble the ball. They, after all, had an extra man on their team in that the entire city had become involved.

The first action taken by the mob was to capture Gaius and Aristarchus and then with one accord (one purpose) rush them into the theater, the theater where they hoped to resolve the matter in favor of their great goddess Diana and the well being of the silversmiths.

Gaius had lived in Corinth. He,

in fact, according to I Corinthians 1:14, was one of the two people Paul had baptized. Paul also, according to Romans 16:23, had been a guest at the home of Gaius. These facts mean that he was very dear to Paul and that an attack against Gaius was an attack against Paul. We also know from Colossians 4:10 that Aristarchus was also very close to Paul, since he travelled to Rome with him when he was taken there as a prisoner.

"And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not" (Acts 19:30).

The attention of the city of Ephesus had suddenly been centered on the theater and that which was transpiring there. It is likely that a large fire in the theater would not have drawn more attention. The danger to Paul's friends and brothers in Christ, in Paul's mind, was similar to a fire in the theater. Paul, in fact, felt that his brethren in Christ were in grave danger. He therefore planned to do what he could, even at the risk of his own life, to rescue them. This fact has much to say regarding the temperament of the great apostle. He was not only dedicated to his Lord, but also to the brethren. Paul also demonstrated his love and regard for the brethren by closing his letters with a salute to certain people. Paul, no doubt, hoped that by entering the theater and speaking to the people, he could make a strong defense in their behalf. I'm sure, that if it had been necessary, he would have sacrificed himself in their behalf. The record, however, shows that the "disciples suffered him not" to enter the theater.

"And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theater" (Acts 19:31).

I understand that the correct word for "Asia" as it is used in our text, is the word "Asiarchs" and refers to those persons who resided over certain things and over the public games. It was their responsibility to make sure that the proper services of religion were observed and that proper honor was shown to the Roman emperor in the public festivals. They were elected officials whose office had to be validated at Rome. Our text informs us that these men were Paul's friends. They probably were not brethren in Christ, or they would have been referred to as brethren. They, however, were his friends, which means that they had respect for him. They may not have agreed with what he had to say, but they agreed that he had the right to say it. The silversmiths, on the other hand, were not his friends, because they felt that he was placing in jeopardy the temple of Diana and their occupation as silversmiths. The Asiarchs obviously did not hold to this view. It has occurred to me that, since Paul was a Roman citizen, and since the office of the Asiarchs had to be validated by Rome, that this was the means for a friendship between them and Paul. They, in other words, may have had their occupation in mind. It was not that Paul could have helped them, but they may not have known that. God, however, had planned ahead for the resolving of the problem which lay before Paul. God, in other words, had already planned for a means of escape before the

emergency arose. We, in some cases, close the barn door after the horse escapes, but our God is never found wanting, or trying to correct an error.

"Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not whereof they were come together" (Acts 19:32).

There is little success that can be achieved if there is not a common purpose. The mob before us had joined together, but many did not know why they had joined. They had joined because it just appeared to be the thing to do. There are multitudes today who live their entire lives just following the crowd. This fact is especially true in the fashion world and it is especially true in the religious world.

"And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people" (Acts 19:33).

The main thrust of the mob was made in the defense of Diana, the goddess of hunting. The Jews, who lived in Ephesus, on the other hand, did not worship Diana and neither did they accept Jesus as the Messiah. This raises the question as to why did they draw Alexander out of the multitude in an effort to defend themselves? It appears that the multitude was not only against Paul, but also against the Jews; since they felt that they too were a threat to the goddess Diana. The Jews, after all, did agree with Paul in that they believed that there were "no gods which are made with hands."

The nature of the defense which Alexander tried to make cannot be certain. Perhaps he was trying to explain that the Jews, in the main, did not hold to the doctrines taught by Paul and that it was unfair for them to be judged alongside of Paul.

"But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice, about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:34).

The mob, when Alexander tried to speak, shouted him down by crying out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." They, no doubt, had only planned to shout Alexander down, but the shouting did not stop for about the space of two hours. They, by this action, forbid anyone to make a defense. They insisted by their action, that only they were free to speak as they pleased.

The crowd, up to this point, had been confused, but the confusion ended when they "all with one voice" began to exalt Diana. They, in other words, all agreed that Paul's God could not compare with their god Diana which was made with hands.

It is likely that Demetrius and his cohorts, who began this entire affair, were the ones who also caused the cry in behalf of Diana to begin and last for two hours.

"And when the town-clerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?" (Acts 19:35).

The town-clerk was able to convince the mob that they were over re-acting. He convinced them that their cause was not in danger of being brought to nought, or made useless. Perhaps those who observed the magnificent temple of Diana were convinced that such a marvellous structure would stand forever and always be venerated. The temple, after all, was four hundred and twenty five feet long, two hundred and twenty feet wide with one hundred and twenty seven pillars that were sixty feet high. It appeared therefore that the mob was over reacting; that they were trying to kill a fly with a sledge hammer.

The town-clerk, or the public notary, whose job must have included that of keeping the peace, persuaded the mob that the worship of Diana was too large to be effected by a few Jews. We, of course, today, know that the town-clerk did not foresee the impact which Christianity would have upon that known world.

The town-clerk reminded his audience that the image of Diana, which was within the temple, had been sent to them from Jupiter. He was saying, in essence, that such an image would be more than enough protection from any outside force. You may recall that the safety of Troy was also to have depended on the image of Pallas Minerva (Paddadium), which was also believed to have fallen from heaven.

"Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly" (Acts 19:36).

This passage reminds me of the confidence of those who were on the Titanic. It was thought that she was as safe as a walk through one's yard. Those, therefore, on the Titanic were to relax and have a good time. The town-clerk also advised those in Ephesus to ignore the apparent storm clouds over the city. He advised them to be quiet or relax and do nothing rashly.

"For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess" (Acts 19:37).

The Greek for "churches," as used in the text before us, relates to an edifice erected for the purpose of worship. The temple of Diana and any other like structure, is that which the town-clerk had reference to. The meaning, then, is that Paul, or those with him, had not been guilty of robbing the temple of Diana, or any other such structure. It was also emphasized that they had not used harsh or reproachful language against Diana. Paul had preached against idolatry, but he had not mentioned the name of Diana.

"Wherefore if Demetrius and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another" (Acts 19:38).

The town-clerk, in his own way, had severely rebuked Demetrius and his cohorts. The result being that this was probably the last time that they resorted to such action. This fact means that Paul and the brethren were, as a result of this incident, given much more freedom in the city of Ephesus. I see the mob action, therefore, as God's means in giving His saints more freedom to preach the gospel in that

area of the world.

"But if ye inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly" (Acts 19:39).

The matter at hand, of course, was the wrong which Demetrius and his cohorts felt they had suffered. If there were other matters which related to public affairs, that is, anything relating to the worship of Diana, or other affairs of government, these should be settled in a court of law.

"For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse" (Acts 19:40).

There was danger of any investigation being made by the Roman government. This would mean that Demetrius and his cohorts would have had to explain

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STATEMENTS

(Continued from Page 9)

Savior aside from the other disciples. Peter tries to be, as it were, a friend and counselor to the Lord and tried to discourage Christ from this path. In the last statement we find Peter full of the Holy Spirit declaring Jesus to be the Son of the Living God. The in such a few short verses later, Christ calls Peter's statement here to be that of Satan. Christ instructs Peter to get behind the Lord or we might say in today's expressions "shut up."

One might ask how these things can come to pass? As I said, Peter was quick to speak without necessarily giving his comments a great deal of thought. His statement in Matthew 16:18 came from God. His statement in Matthew 16:22 came from himself and was of the flesh. Peter had begun to contemplate the possibility of Christ setting up His kingdom and beginning to rule and reign on this earth. Peter was considering his position and could not bear what Christ was now saying. Christ began to teach them that His kingdom was not to come at this time. Christ is going to come in the future and set up His kingdom. Some Reform Baptists and others may disagree with these statements, but I have yet to hear them explain Acts 1:6-7 as well as some other very important Scriptures. My friends, there is absolutely no possibility that we are at this time in the days of the Kingdom. The scripture refers to this time and says it will one day come to this earth. Can you imagine the lion lying down beside the lamb and a small child leading them as it prophesied in the book of Isaiah? When Christ comes and actually rules and reigns on this earth, there will be greater miracles than that. The Reform folks spiritualize this truth away and say they cannot happen or are not realistic. As far as I am concerned, they just do not believe the Bible. I too believe in a Christ who is sovereignly ruling over this earth; but I also believe according to the precious Book that our Savior will actually come and rule and reign on the throne of David. The Bible does not say that God is finished with the Jewish nation nor has He written

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STATEMENTS

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them off. I really feel sorry for anyone who believes God is finished with the Jew; I do not wish to get too close to any of these people just in case God desires to judge them and I receive some of the effect. Peter's statement here is totally out of line and Christ rebukes him for it. Peter, at this time, did not seem to understand the will of God for His Son Christ Jesus.

The next statement that Peter makes is found in Matthew 17:4. Peter is again jumping to conclusions. The book of Luke seems to indicate that Peter and the other two disciples awoke from sleep to find Jesus in the midst of a fellowship with Moses and Elijah. They are somewhat amazed to find a light shining from Jesus that was bright enough to lighten this normally dark area. Peter is so thrilled by the thought of being with Jesus, Moses and Elijah that he wants to start a building program. Again the real problem with Peter's comment is that he is not seeking the will of Christ but his own. What would Christ, Moses and Elijah do with three tabernacles? Peter is also making the three men equal. Christ is equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit; He should never be made equal with any man. I think we can also see that Peter's mind is excited about the thought of staying in such a position where all is so wonderful. Today we call this the mountain top experience. We as Christians are able at times to go to Bible Conferences and Meetings where it seems that we are able to get so close to God. There is nothing wrong with these experiences. I have been in meetings where it seemed that we were able to shut out the World and other influences, and it seemed as if we were almost in Heaven. It was a great feeling; but after a few days, we had to leave this meeting and come back to reality. We had to face the world, temptation, sin and all the effects these things have upon us. We would like to live in the Sweet By and By, but we have to live in the nasty now and now. Peter, the other disciples and Jesus had to come down off the mountain where the Lord was transfigured and where they saw Him in much of His glory; and come down and live amongst the sinful, sick and natural people that they had been with before the event. This should not discourage us from having mountain top experiences. They are a break from the normal and are a great lift for us. They also cause us to rejoice at the thought of how much better, even than these meetings, heaven will be. We cannot blame Peter for wanting to stay on the mountain, but we should realize that his request was more to his benefit than anyone else's. This was not the will of God for Christ at this time.

The next statement made by Peter deals to some extent with the concept of church and state. It is found in Matthew 17:24-27. Peter is first questioned by a tax collector. Does your master pay tribute? Peter responds in the affirmative. We have no record to either prove or disprove what Peter said to this point in time. The rest of this passage would indicate that Peter has spoken correctly. After this, Peter comes to where Jesus is; and Jesus, anticipating his coming and knowing all that has been said, ask him another question. Who pays the

taxes to the government? I think we can put this question in reference to the customs and traditions of that time. Rome did not charge the Roman citizens great taxes, but received it of the people that they conquered. Israel and other nations paid great tribute to Rome. Thus, the question Christ asked of Peter was, who paid the taxes, the children or the strangers of the King. Peter rightly answered, it was those who are the strangers.

I believe that Christians should be conservative in their political views. The party that is for liberal ideals such as abortion, giving equal rights to all whether they be white, black, citizens, foreigners, men, women, homosexual, lesbian, and are opposed to the concept of children having the liberty to have even a moment to pray in our public schools, should be avoided by God fearing people. When it comes to taxes, the government is already getting too much and wasting too much. The government cannot tax industry because industry receives its money from the selling of its products. When one raises the taxes to industry, industry raises the prices of their products and the common middle class people keep paying their taxes. One cannot tax the rich, they will find the loop holes; nor can they tax the poor because they have no money to pay taxes. It is the middle class income people that are paying the taxes in this country. The last four years have been good for the middle class because our taxes have actually decreased and inflation has not increased very much. Because I am a conservative Christian, I say four more years. To conclude this passage, Peter is instructed to go catch a fish. God in His sovereign power provides the money for Christ to pay the taxes for Himself and the disciples. We might notice that this was accomplished as Peter caught the first fish.

The next statement made by Peter in the book of Matthew is a question. Peter continues to appear to be the leading disciple. He is mentioned more than the others usually asking a question, making a statement or being asked a question. His question is, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). Christ answer is much easier to say than to practice. He said that we should forgive someone seventy times seven. To take this literally would mean that you must forgive your brother 490 times; I believe that a spiritual application should be applied here, and it means that we are to forgive our brother continually. I would find it hard to believe that anyone is going to count to 490 so he can stop forgiving his brother. If he did, he would be wrong because if we cannot forgive, we cannot show love; and we are commanded to love one another. John 15:12. The passage that follows Peter's statement is so good. It tells us how that Christ forgave us all our sins which were a great tragedy and cost Him dearly. We then ought to be willing to forgive our brother of these smaller matters. To make a mistake is human, but to forgive is divine, so let us show the forgiving spirit that will show the world our love.

The next statement, is another question. It is found in Matthew 19:27. In actuality this question

began in Matthew 18:1. The disciples were wanting to know who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Now Peter, feeling a little sorry for himself, asks the question, what are we going to get? We have forsaken our families, friends, business to follow you, what position will we receive and what reward will we have? I think we all have moments of discouragement and despair. Christ answers Peter and us by saying there is much laid away in store for those who have put their faith and trust in Christ. The Christian's benefits are not altogether on this earth. We do receive some small benefits here because we know that Christ gives us a peace and joy that no sinner has ever received. The sinner may be richer and look as if he is much more at ease, having it made in the shade as they say. My friend, he worries himself to death trying to gain more and not loose what he has gained. David said it well in Psalms 37. Fret not for we have more laid up for us in heaven than we can ever imagine. R.G. Lee, a great preacher who, I have been told, had an unusual gift for describing things, said this to his wife as he lay on his bed about to die. I've seen a glimpse of heaven and it is far more wonderful than I ever described. God has given us so much. When we think of the faith and grace that He has granted to us so that we might be saved, and continue to live on this earth while waiting for our glorification, how wonderful are these blessings. The promise of eternal life that has been given us and all the wonderful provisions that He is providing for us over there, these should cause us to rejoice and be thankful for all His bountiful blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord. **"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen"** (Jude 24-25). Let us not worry about which of us will be the greatest in the kingdom, but let us rejoice that we are among those whom God loves, and we will be allowed to be there with Him.

As we attempt to conclude our study on the sayings of Peter in the book of Matthew, I would like to say that I have found this study to be very profitable. I hope that you have found this subject as enjoyable to read as I have found it to prepare and write. In this last article, I will use a couple of passages from the book of John to bring out a few more precious truths.

I will begin in John 13 which will put us in the same setting as we will be in when we come back to Matthew. John 13 and Matthew 26 deal with some of the same events. We find first that Christ is teaching the disciples to be good propagators of the gospel. One of the most important things that must be learned is that all members in the church are both brethren and equal. From the pastor or song leader to the little widow in the pew, in the eyes of God, we are all equal. There is not one in the church that should have authority over another. The preacher has no more business running the church than a deacon or anyone else. The church is to be run in a democratic manner and all have

an equal vote. There is no place for a dictator in the church. I would also like to add, God hates something even more than a dictator. The doctrine of the Nicholaitanes which means a graded ministry or where one Pastor is over a group of Pastors either in the church or in a group of churches. This is being practiced in a multitude of churches today, including the Baptist.

When we come to John 13, we see Christ teaching that these things are wrong; and He proves it by washing their feet. It was a custom in those days for the servant of a household to wash the feet of their masters and the guests. When Christ did this, He was saying that he who will rule as pastor or as a deacon let him be a servant to all the church. Some preachers will do nothing for the church in the way of menial labor such as janitorial type work. They say that this is below their dignity. We ought not to have this attitude. Let us notice Peter's statements, first he says do not wash my feet. He was embarrassed that Christ would be a servant unto him. When Christ said, if you will have any part with me, I must wash your feet, Peter indicates that he wants an entire bath. The water in this case or the amount of it that got on to Peter made little difference; the important thing was the act of washing his feet. This is not like baptism nor did Christ tell His disciples to do this in remembrance of Him. It did not show the picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and thus is not a church ordinance. It was done to teach that we are to serve our Lord and help the people when we can.

The next statement that Peter makes in Matthew is found in Chapter 26:33. We notice in Matthew 26:22 that all of the disciples asked Christ if they were the one who would betray Him. In John 13:24, it says that Peter asked John to ask Christ if he was the one who would betray Him. I am not sure why Peter does this; it does not show much faith on Peter's part. Christ had called and established His disciples for the work they were to do in building the church. As we see here, all of them including Peter lack faith and doubt their own ability. We must realize that this happened before they had the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling them. We also realize the weakness of the flesh and how quick we are, even though we have the power of the Holy Spirit, to doubt our great Savior's power. Let us not be too quick to judge these disciples.

Peter's next statement again shows how inconsistent Peter is. After showing this weakness in faith, just a few minutes later in Matthew 26:33 and 35, Peter says he will not be offended nor will he deny Christ even if it means his own death. We have already discussed the fact that Peter would speak before he thought. Peter makes a pair of statements here that are of the flesh and full of pride. We have all at some time in our life promised that we would do something when a certain set of circumstances arose. We must be most careful of this, because until the time comes, we may or we may not respond as we think. Peter makes a brave statement that he would stand with Christ with no regard to his own physical being. There will be a time in Peter's life when he will truly do this, after he has greatly grown in

faith and when it is the right time in the plan of God. At the present time Peter is trying to show some responsibility and what a good leader he would be. But this is not the plan of God, Peter will not be strengthened by God and will be allowed to become afraid. He will both be offended and deny Christ three times before the cock crows. This is found in Matthew 26:70, 72 and 74. This would be a very dark day for our Savior who is turned over to His enemies by one of His friends and left by the rest of His followers. But we must not only realize that these men were weak in the flesh and could not remain faithful; but we must also realize God chose to allow this and caused. His son to be left standing alone.

Peter's denial of Christ comes to pass because the temptation is greater than he can bear. He followed afar off; he walked with the wrong crowd; he sat and warmed his hands with those who wanted to kill Christ and was pressured into the three denials of our Savior. This was the will of God, but Peter will be held accountable for his action. If not for the grace of God, we could all be left in our sin, and we are still responsible to God. He doesn't make us sin; He just leaves us to ourselves; we will follow our own nature and sin. As for Christ, He was left to take the sin of this world upon His shoulders all alone. He could have called for 72,000 angels to come at this time and save Him, but He came to this world for this purpose.

We want to conclude this article in the book of John. In the book of Matthew, we leave Peter under the circumstance of the denial that we have just discussed; but this is not the final chapter of his life. We want you to notice that Peter is going to go forward for God and do a great job in his service. I believe that this turn about comes from the events found in John 21:15-17. Here Christ asked Peter three times "lovest thou me more than these." Peter does not answer Him and use the same word for love until the third time. Through this teaching, Peter is welcomed back into the fold and is instructed some things we had better never forget; and that is, to feed the sheep. Whether we pastor or laborer in Christ's vineyard in another capacity, the most important priority in our life should be to feed the sheep. You may feel that you are not in a position where you can feed the flock. My friend, you can pray for your pastor that the message that God lays on his heart will be the blessing that the congregation needs. This is the main reason that we conclude our articles by asking for your prayers. As this paper goes forth into many homes and these articles are read, we pray that they will indeed feed the flocks of our Great Saviour, Jesus Christ.

WORKS

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those instructions knew what they meant. They had presupposed the users would all be smarter than I. They missed the boat at least one time. I wasn't

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WORKS

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quite smart enough.

I would contend that the Epistle of James was written with a presupposition. The presupposition was that the readers understood grace. The initial recipients of this epistle may well have had such an understanding, but (sadly) our contemporary preachers and teachers have so effectively polluted the meaning of grace that we no longer have this perception. Grace does (in fact) mean unmerited favor, and this means we can do nothing to contribute to our own salvation. I'm writing this discourse as a summation from a sermon I gave at Temple Baptist Church (Centralia, Illinois), on Feb. 3, 1991. It was so well received that I felt it might be well to pass the gist of it along. I told my wife I intended to cover the epistle in about 10 minutes. She said I probably could since I once covered the entire Bible in 20. I think I took about 15. This is not really all that difficult when primarily addressing the context.

The first chapter tells about trials: The purpose, cause, and effect. It is when we get to 1:21 that I find the first significant indication of the presupposition that I have postulated. Now, a postulation may sound quite valid and still be erroneous. It is only when substantiation is offered that we should consider it seriously. I consider Scripture as the only real firm evidence. The phrase that I consider a clue to this perspective is the one which declares that the work is implanted and that this can save our souls. Yeah! That seems to be exactly what it means. Context? The "thrust" of this chapter is understanding our trials and has little to do with this phrase. The point is there's no conflict between the context and the literal meaning of this verse, and this is why I am convinced that James wrote this epistle presupposing that grace was understood.

One verse isn't all that convincing, perhaps, so I'll attempt to reconcile this with other passages to follow. We'll generally refer to the basic gist (context) of the chapter as we go, lest you think I'm attempting to pull your leg. In looking at the second chapter, we can determine, rather quickly that it deals with prejudices, or biases. It is 2:14-18, that I'd like to call the reader's attention to; because this again confirms the precept of grace, and that grace precedes faith and works. Verses 14 through 17 teach us that our natural faith will accomplish nothing. It could teach us faith didn't mean anything, were that not inconsistent with other Scripture. Remember Hebrews Chapter 11? Of course that chapter will also tell us faith is evidence, or a manifestation of salvation. The verses we're dealing with here affirm that unproductive faith is worthless; but they continue to say that faith is proven by good-works, as certainly as Hebrews 11:1 has told us grace is proven by faith. If the understanding of this is still doubtful to any, let me remind all that Ephesians 2:8 did declare that we are saved by grace (through faith). It seems unmistakable, then, upon merging that verse

with what we've read here that the program begins with grace, flows through faith, and results in works. We have good-works only because God's program of grace works. The Word is implanted (in grace) and we have works because we're granted a Divine gift of faith which will cause works. Our own natural (free-will) faith is useless. Recall now John 3:6! Faith, from our flesh is ineffective: Divine faith will cause works.

Verse 18 sums the entire matter up, and would appear (to me) to be enough to settle the matter totally, unless strong reason were given to indicate a more subtle meaning; because it clearly affirms that faith is proven by works. This tells us plainly that works do not happen unless the true kind of faith is resident. Whether there's a "bad" faith might be unproven, but obviously true faith will result in works.

The remainder of this chapter elaborates upon works as a companion, with genuine faith, in our justification. The third chapter deals with effective faith and the working result. It teaches us faith and works are dynamically linked, being inseparable. Verse 12 is the classic illustration. It states that figs and olives are produced by specific plants and not from any other plant types, and that fresh water isn't found in a body of salt water. Perhaps, I'd best repeat my previous statement with some elaboration, for this verse again affirms the effectiveness of grace. The result is consistent with the seed (source). Grace does work so completely that faith and works will be there. This is (apparently) so certain that it can be compared to fruit and the productive plant. The proper fruit will be absent unless the Divinely caused type of faith is there to cause the fruit. Works here is equivalent to the fruit!

Before going further, I'd like to pause to remind readers what Proverbs 1:7 relates to us: It declares that fear of God is the beginning of knowledge. I'd like to suggest this tells us something about the method God uses to implant our faith within us. I'm not certain but what every conversion will begin with fear, in some fashion or other. Rahab the harlot was frightened into repentance and did her work against her native Jericho as an indirect result; but we've read in this epistle that she was justified, anyway. Her conversion was genuine and all because of grace. The fact that God may use fear as the opener does not nullify the effect. Pay no attention to those who will say they do not think we should attempt to frighten people into a conversion. God does not agree with them.

We've read that we work out our salvation in Philippians 2:12-13. The epistle of James provides insight into how. The word is implanted, giving faith; being the result of grace. Faith will produce works as an evidence of faith, and also (indirectly) of grace. This is justification. Faith, then, has been implanted and we work-it-out. This is salvation. If we have God's implanted faith, can we really even help but do something right? Yes! Grace is effectual. It works!

I'll now summarize the remainder of the epistle by saying that this is what the last two chapters of the epistle does also. It sums up the epistle. In doing so it elaborates upon the causes, characteristics, consequences, and

correcting of our sins; in chapter 4. Chapter 5 begins with a warning, follows with some words about prayer, and closes with a word about conversion. I have covered these two chapters in the interest of leaving no stone unturned, so that the readers will not think I'm ignoring part of this book. I do not attempt to expound upon any of these verses, since I do not believe they would contribute significantly to the intent of this writing. I have hoped to present a concise explanation of just why and how the Epistle of James is in harmony with all other Scripture on the issue of Sovereign Grace.

In closing this thesis, let us revive James 2:18 for a final look. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." This provides a good summary of the epistle of James, but it does even more than that. It provides a good summary for the New Testament and in doing so, it gets right down to the true intent of the entire Scripture. A purpose of the Old Testament is to provide a basis for the message of the New Testament. It is in the ministry of Christ that the message was made complete, and this verse affirms the working result of grace. When grace will have been effected, it will manifest itself (through faith) in the final result, and this result will include works as a testimony of a salvation which will be the ultimate result. As I'm guilty of saying repeatedly, perhaps to the point of being boring: Grace works! The works bear evidence of a resultant faith and, as declared in Ephesian 2:8, grace is the basis for faith.

ACTS

(Continued from Page 10)

their action to the Roman officials. They, in fact, were subject to being "called in question," or called in for questioning. The result would have meant death to Demetrius and his cohorts, since the Roman law considered the instigating of a riot to have been a capital offense, and punishable by death.

"And when he had thus spoken he dismissed the assembly" (Acts 19:41).

REJOICE EVERMORE

by C.D. Cole

(I Thess. 5:16).

Christian joy is far removed from the mirth of this world, and there is plenty of laughter in spite of abounding sin and shame and sorrow. There is a veritable army of men and women who draw big wages to make people laugh, but the joy of the Lord does not come that way.

I think we can safely say the devil is concerned for the happiness of his dupes. By keeping his people happy, he hopes to hold them in his kingdom. The devil is in danger of losing the disturbed sinner. I sometimes think he must be the president and general manager of the world's amusement companies.

Let us not be fooled into thinking that everyone who is full of mirth is also full of blessings. Christian joy is not determined by the shape of the face. Some are naturally more

cheerful than others, but natural cheerfulness is not Christian joy.

We are commanded to rejoice evermore, and always. Christian gladness is a part of Christian duty. He who does not rejoice in the Lord is disobedient to the Lord. What it takes to make a man happy is a revelation of what he is. Church members who get their joy from the world are very apt to be of the world.

Primitive believers were happier than present-day Christians. The source of their joy was different, too. When the apostles had seen their Lord carried up into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy (Lk 24:52). And following Pentecost, they continued "daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:46, 47). Peter and John left the council, after shameful treatment, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas, while in prison and with "their feet fast in the stocks" prayed and sang praises unto God (Acts 16:24, 25). And at a later date Peter writes: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Peter 1:8).

I think it is conclusive that the early Christians were much happier than Twentieth Century Christians. And why? May some reasons be suggested in the hope that all of us will be challenged, instructed, and corrected.

Why Early Christians Were Happy

1. Lack of joy is due to a lack of interest in heavenly things. The early believers had few interests here on earth. They realized their portion was in heaven. Having no continuing city, they were seeking one to come, "a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." As pilgrims, they desired "a better country, that is, an heavenly." With them, the kingdom of God was "not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

2. Failure to witness for Christ is another reason for the little joy of most Christians. Early believers were bent on making Christ known to others. When scattered, they went everywhere preaching the gospel -- they "gossiped" about Christ. It was when they were engaged in speaking of Christ, in the face of bitter persecution, that they were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:52).

Much of the joyful part of our religion is missed by making joy the immediate and sole objective. Do not most believers read their Bibles, attend church, and pray in order to obtain comfort and find assurance? But this is not the only way to comfort and assurance. Nor do we find comfort and assurance by ransacking for evidence in a mass of past experiences. We are to manifest interest in others by telling them of the blessed Saviour. By seeking the salvation of others we find assurance of our own. By leading others to faith in Christ, our own faith is strengthened. In trying to

lead others into the sunlight of His love our own hope is made brighter. In talking of Christ to others, He becomes more precious and wonderful to our own soul. There is no joy like the joy of personal witnessing for Him.

3. Conformity to this present evil world is another reason for the little joy among Christians. We are mixed up with the world, and so much like the world, and have so many joys of the world, that we know but little of the joy of the Holy Spirit. We are so bent on making money and finding pleasure, that we have missed the true riches and are poor in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

I am sure that the real Christians of Russia know more of the joy of the Holy Ghost than do the Christians in this land of peace and plenty. The Lord does not let His people down. For every cross there is a compensating joy. If we had more of the martyr spirit, we would have more joy in the Holy Spirit. In becoming popular with the world, the church has lost its power to witness to it. We have lost its respect and confidence.

The Source of Joy

The source of joy is the Lord. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4). This means to be in the Lord and find joy in the promises that are in Him. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (II Cor. 1:20). This means that all that God has promised is in Christ and certain; and that we ought to say, Amen, to the glory of God. The promise of forgiveness is in Him (Eph. 1:7). The love of God, from which we cannot be separated, is in Him (Rom. 8:39). The hope of the resurrection is in Him (Eph. 1:11). All spiritual blessings in the heavenlies are in Christ (Eph. 1:22).

ANNOUNCEMENT

Elder Andy Proctor has accepted a call to pastor the Landmark Baptist Church of King, N.C. He is scheduled to move on the field on July 18th. This brings together a fine and able preacher and a very fine church -- I know them both, especially the church, well. I urge you to pray for this work. You will be blessed in visiting this church and hearing this preacher anytime you can.

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