

# The Old Paths – April / June : 2019 – No 22

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**T**he entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. ... Look Thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy Name. Order my steps in Thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.

(Psalm 119:130,132-133)



## From the Editor's Desk

### **“Bread from Heaven”**

**(Exodus 16:4)**

“Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, (lit. a portion of a day in its day) that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no” (Exod. 16:4).

The manna was a test of DILIGENCE; “Go out and gather”. They had to gather before the sun became hot. God does not encourage sloth or laziness. It would have been too bad if an Israelite had slept in. It did not fall into their mouths. We need to take time daily, to feed for ourselves from the Word of God.

The manna was a test of FRESHNESS; It fell upon the “dew”. The refreshing purity of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures are necessary for our daily needs.

The manna was a test of DEPENDENCE; It was God's daily provision. As thy day is so we need food for our soul. Get a daily provision for yourself.

The manna was a test of QUANTITY; “Every man according to his eating, an omer for every man”. We can take to ourselves in proportion to the hunger we bring. The Word of God can never be exhausted.

The manna was a test of TIME; They were to gather six days. A man was no looser by observing the Sabbath. Are we too busy? Do we set aside time for the systematic study and meditation of the Word of God? Gather in view of worship especially on the Lord’s Day.

The manna was a test of USE. Hoarding up was a manifest distrust of God. It was adversely affected by the influences of the day. Preach the Word, give it out, use its promises, practise its principles.

The manna was a test of OBEDIENCE. “That I may prove them”. Wilful disobedience brought offensive results. Left to the morning it “bred worms and stank”. The “worms” of covetousness, pride, jealousy, worldliness result from neglect of the Word. “Grinding and beating” occurred when they got discontent and the manna was despised; “before our eyes,” they made it like “fresh oil” (Num. 11:8). Many want to change the Bible, make it more palatable, oily, easy to swallow, replace with new versions and perversions.

From another issue of the magazine, we trust that the reader will be nourished in the words of life and good doctrine.

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna” (Rev. 2:17).

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## Pride in Proverbs

Familiarity with the warnings and counsels of the book of Proverbs can only be a blessing in the sin-soaked climate of today. The fear of the Lord, presented as the “beginning of wisdom”, is the only thing that can preserve us from the social and sexual sin all around us (Job 28:28). Proverbs not only warns us about sin, but it also points to that which is the first and the worst of all sins – pride. Pride caused the expulsion of the “anointed cherub” from heaven (Ezekiel 28), and of Adam and Eve from the garden (Genesis 3). Pride is an element in every temptation and is irreconcilable with the “love of the Father” (1John 2:15-16).

So what does Proverbs say about pride?

Firstly, it shows us that pride is **detested** by God. “A proud look” is first among the things the Lord hates and abominates in Proverbs 6:16-19. There are some prohibitions which are obviously only relevant to the Old Testament dispensation, when God was dealing with an earthly nation. But when Scripture uses the present tense and tells us what God “hateth” or “loveth”, we can be sure that He still hates or loves those things, and always will.

Not only does God hate pride, but those who are proud are detestable to Him: “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD” (16:5). There is no such thing as good pride, Proverbs 21:4 says: “An high look, and a proud heart ... is sin”. It does not matter whether it is pride of class, race, nationality, family, position, or whatever kind of pride it may be, God hates it as sin. Divine wisdom speaks in chapter 8:13, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate”, and if we have the fear of the Lord in us, we will be wise enough to hate the same things.

Secondly, we need to beware of the **deception** of pride. “There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up” (30:13). The proud deceive others and themselves by their ostentation and haughtiness, and seduce others to follow their example. The godly counsel of Proverbs is: “Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud” (16:19). The proud boast of things which they must leave behind at death; fellowship with the humble will continue in heaven for ever.

Thirdly, Proverbs also tells us of the **damage** caused by pride. *Evil-speaking*: “In the mouth of the foolish is a

rod of pride” (14:3). A rod in the mouth does more damage than a rod in the hand. The fool exalts himself by trampling on others, he becomes renowned by ruining the reputation of others. In contrast with this “the lips of the wise shall preserve them” and will “minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

It is also the cause of *damaged relationships*: “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife” (28:25); “Only by pride cometh contention” (13:10). It is pride that causes unnecessary divisions and pride which keeps them in force, but those whom God has made wise through His word will seek to maintain the unity of the saints on a Scriptural basis: “with the well advised is wisdom”.

Pride will also cause *shame*: “When pride cometh, then cometh shame” (11:2). Nebuchadnezzar boasted of the greatness of his kingdom and of his city and of himself, but lost his reason and became like an animal until he learnt humility. “But with the lowly is wisdom”. Proverbs 29:23 teaches the same thing: “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit”.

Pride expresses itself in *mockery and scorn*: “Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath” (21:24). But God “scorneth the scornors” and “giveth grace unto the lowly” (3:34). This last verse is quoted by both James and Peter in the New Testament as, “God resisteth the proud” (James 4:6; 1Peter. 5:5). The word translated “resisteth” suggests “God sets Himself in battle array against the scornors”.

Finally, let us consider the **danger** of pride. Proverbs 16:5 solemnly warns, “though hand join in hand, he (the proud) shall not be unpunished”. Three times the book of Proverbs speaks of the destruction of the proud.

Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”. Pride will never last for ever, it is always a preface to disaster. There are numerous examples of this in the Scriptures, such as Pharaoh (Exodus 15), Haman (Esther 7), Belshazzar (Daniel 5), etc. Satan himself was not tolerated in heaven for a moment once his heart was lifted up with self-admiration. The Lord Jesus said, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

Proverbs 18:12: “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility”. If there is no repentance, pride will end in destruction. Three times over the Lord stated, “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted”, in contexts which speak of fellowship among disciples (Matt. 23:12), social life in the world (Luke 14:11) and justification before God (18:14).

Proverbs 15:25: “The LORD will destroy the house of the proud”. The destruction will not only be individual but will extend to all who by association are infected with this disease. Can we apply this to a local assembly? Sadly, there have been companies of God’s people who have become proud of their orthodoxy or of their zeal. Instead of remembering that it was by God’s grace and enabling that they held fast the truth and served faithfully, they become puffed up with pride and show disdain towards other companies who may be struggling. We know of assemblies which were once thriving but which no longer exist, probably for this reason. There are also proud men who want to organize assemblies into a denomination. They want to have a position of authority over many assemblies. Notice how Peter links the service of true leaders in a local assembly with the subject of humility in 1Peter 5:1-6. They are not to be “lords over God’s heritage”.

But destruction need not be the outcome. Even the self-satisfied church in Laodicea was called upon by the Lord to repent (Rev. 3:19), and those who did so could expect the most precious fellowship with the Lord Himself: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne”. Truly, “honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (29:23)!

... Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble ... (1Peter 5:6)

# The Acts of the Apostles

## Chapter 7:17-43

We continue our consideration of Stephen's response to the Sanhedrin. We have considered Stephen's references to incidents in the life of Abraham and Joseph. We shall now consider the spiritual applications he makes from the life of Moses.

### **(c) The Moses Section (v.17-43) – Divine Deliverance**

This is the longest sub-section in Stephen's address, most likely in response to the false accusation that he had spoken "blasphemous words against Moses" (Acts 6.11). He commences by referring to "the time of the promise", the set time for deliverance from Egyptian slavery. God, who is in control of history, is always true to His word. God had already fulfilled His promise to Abraham regarding a seed (Isaac) (Gen. 15:4). His second promise regarding the land (Gen. 15:16) will also be fulfilled.

### **Moses' first forty years**

Stephen reminds his hearers that the purpose of God in deliverance drew out Satan's murderous enmity using Pharaoh, "so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live." The Egyptians then were opposed to Moses, to God and His worship. Stephen shows that at the bleakest time, when suffering was greatest, a deliverer was born. Moses was no ordinary child; he was beautiful and well pleasing in the sight of God.

While Satan may violently oppose, God's promise and purpose cannot fail! Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses and raised him as her very own child. Indeed she had plans of a great future for Moses! Stephen provides information additional to that contained in the Old Testament about Moses' Egyptian education and that he was a man of power and action.

However, divine providence is never a guide for faith! Human wisdom would surely suggest that Moses should strive for success in Egypt, increase his influence and then work step by step for the good of his people. But God's will always progresses through faith's response to divine revelation. Providence brought Moses into the place of Egyptian power: but it was faith that brought him out of Egypt to gain power with God. When Moses was forty years old, "it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel." God caused that desire to investigate their plight and seek to remedy it.

Stephen then rehearses how Moses assisted, defended and avenged one of his brethren, see Exodus chapter 2. However, Moses' stirrings of faith and purpose came up against outright rejection. The reality of the promises God had given to the patriarchs and, through them, to the children of Israel, had vanished from their consciousness; they evidently had no expectation of deliverance. Stephen is hereby reminding the Sanhedrin that Israel's oldest folly was the rejection of God's purposed deliverer. Moses thought his own people would recognise his God-given vocation to rescue them, but he was rejected: "For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not." The parallel with our Lord Jesus Christ is obvious: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). "He is despised and rejected of men ... He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isaiah 53:3).

Moses also sought to reconcile Israelites at variance, which is a difficult task whatever the circumstances. The person doing the wrong is always the hardest to reconcile; and is generally the least likely to accept their fault! Moses discovers that the deepest hurt and cruellest blow can come from God's own people when they put their own will first! Thus the people rejected Moses the **first time** as God's chosen leader.

As Joseph had been rejected by his brethren; so also Moses is rejected. History is again repeating itself. However, as in the earlier rejection of Joseph, their refusal of Moses could not thwart divine purpose.

### Moses' second forty years

Alarmed when his impulsive action was known, Moses leaves Egypt for Midian. While he resided there for forty years, he was always a temporary dweller, a foreigner, there. Stephen repeatedly stresses the pilgrim theme throughout his address. Like Joseph, Moses marries when in exile and, also, has two sons born. Similarly, Christ's fruitfulness will only become evident after the nation's rejection of Him.

At the end of this second forty years Moses receives a divine revelation in the wilderness of Sinai. An angel of the Lord, the special representative of God in His dealings with men, comes from God's presence to speak directly to Moses. While it was the angel who appeared, it was the Lord's voice which called to him! The angel speaks for God, and appears to Moses when he was still rejected by his brethren.

Moses draws near to the burning bush and hears a message direct from the Lord to him, "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... Then said the Lord to him." Moses obeys the command to remove his shoes from off his feet to stand barefoot in Sinai in the presence of the Lord. So far as the Sanhedrin was concerned there was no holy ground outside the holy land, but it was Moses' experience to learn, as Stephen here asserts, that wherever God reveals Himself, is holy ground.

What is more, the Lord states with emphasis "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning." So the Lord who met Moses in Sinai had also been in Egypt! He was not merely an observer, but "am come down to deliver them."

This Moses, whom the children of Israel had refused forty years previously, is the very one whom God appoints to be their ruler and deliverer. Though initially rejected by their brethren, Joseph and Moses were chosen by God to be deliverers of the people the **second time**.

### Moses' third forty years

Moses' leadership and ministry were authenticated in the same way as that of the apostles, by the showing of "wonders and signs." The Lord Jesus Christ similarly authenticated His own ministry. But the Jewish leadership in their prejudice against Christ refused the evidence before them.

Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy chapter 18 is then cited: "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear." Stephen is showing that rejection of Christ involves the rejection of Moses' prophecy – the Moses they professed to revere, the Moses who had formerly been rejected by his brethren. The Jewish teachers variously suggested that Moses' prophecy referred to Joshua, Jeremiah, etc., but never Jesus of Nazareth! But in refusing to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the person foretold, they also opposed Moses. Stephen is relentless in exposing the uncomfortable implications of their obstinate opposition to the Gospel.

Perhaps the phrase "church in the wilderness" needs some explanation. This refers to Israel in their collective, called out, capacity – essentially an assembly in the wilderness. However, Israel is **never** called the assembly in the land of Israel. This is the only reference in the New Testament to "church / assembly" being used in connection with God's earthly people; and it relates to a period in their history some 1,500 years previously. Therefore, there is **no** basis to assert that Israel was the church in the Old Testament! **Israel and the church are totally distinct**; Israel has an earthly, and the church has a heavenly, hope and focus. But as Moses was with the 'old assembly', so Christ is with the new and we too are a pilgrim people.

The Lord, who was with Moses and the people in the wilderness, gave to Moses the "lively oracles". That is, the Scriptures imparted by God to Moses were inherently 'living' oracles, which is much more than the dynamic effect they have on those who obey them. However, the privileged nation of Israel, during the subsequent course of their history, refused to obey God. This was apparent in Moses' lifetime when they turned to idolatry and worshipped the golden calf. So Moses was not only refused in Egypt, but in heart the people also disowned him in the wilderness. Thus the fathers rejected Moses a **second time**, and in their thoughts and desires, "turned back again into Egypt." It was one thing to bring them out of Egypt physically, but an altogether more difficult thing to take Egypt out of their affections and desires. Unbelief

always craves a present and visible guide. So they commissioned Aaron to make them a substitute god, an idol, to replace Moses.

Idolatry, which became full-blown in the land of Israel, commenced in the wilderness. The people supplied the gold, Aaron made the idol and they had a debauched and licentious celebration in honour of what their hands had made.

In rejecting Moses they rejected God. Even their manufactured idol failed to satisfy them. Away in heart from God, Israel must out-do Egypt and God “gave them up to the worship of the host of heaven”, planets and stars. Men are left to the consequences of their settled choice. While they apparently offered sacrifices to God, their hearts were rebellious against Him. So He could not regard such as being offered to Him.

The Sanhedrin in their smug superiority is being given a salutary history lesson: they were the representatives of a people who had formerly made sacrifices to pagan idols. Even Israel’s greatest king, Solomon, built a high place for Molech, the Saturn god. Stephen concludes by reminding the Sanhedrin that idolatry ended in captivity. God’s longsuffering had endured their idolatry for some 900 years. But divine judgment is sure, even if it seems to slumber.

But the Sanhedrin is not disposed to listen. However, we need to reflect on the lessons being delivered by Stephen. In worship to, and service for, God we must not let **anything** displace our affections for our Lord Jesus Christ otherwise disaster will ensue in our witness and testimony.

(To be continued D.V.)

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## THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

### Paper 8 – The Preservation

As an individual member of the local assembly of the Lord’s people what are my personal responsibilities? What can I do to preserve the Bible based doctrines of the local church? If there are things with which I consider to be unscriptural, should I leave? Should I seek with others to form another company? Alternatively should I seek to preserve what is scriptural and bring Bible truth to bear upon issues of departure to seek recovery? We seek to answer these questions from the doctrinal and practical teaching of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians.

#### 1. TO PRESERVE THE UNITY

(1Cor. 1:10) “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement”. “... there are contentions among you ... Is Christ divided”? (vv. 11,13). The first problem to be dealt with at Corinth was internal division. The name “Christ” is mentioned ten times in the first ten verses of 1Corinthians 1. Another frequently used expression in 1Corinthians is, “In the Lord”. Unity is preserved by my obedience to His Word, to focus on His Person and His Name. Man’s ideas and human gimmicks divide. Observe the words, “fellowship” (holding something with another), “communion” (common interests). In the work place, the unconverted tolerate each other. Toleration is not fellowship. “Speak the same thing” (indicating the “same mind”, united judgement in the Lord, obedience to His Word). “Perfectly joined” (full harmony as limbs in the body). Many other problems are dealt with in later chapters in 1 and 2Corinthians but the company cannot be preserved if there are divisions especially among elders.

#### 2. TO RETAIN THE SANCTITY

(1Cor. 3:16-17) “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If

any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are". The local assembly is a sanctuary for God and as such must be characterised by holiness, purity and solemnity. One individual can lower the standard of reverence and godly fear, "Let a man examine himself" (1Cor. 11:28). Ananias and his wife are early examples of those who tempted the Lord and were carried out dead as a result of their connivance and complicity to deceive.

### 3. TO MAINTAIN THE PURITY

(1Cor. 5:6) "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" At Corinth, there was toleration of sin while glorying in knowledge and gift. Sin tolerated spreads to others. This begins as an individual issue since if someone moves to another assembly the second is contaminated. When this portion of the loaf is removed then the assembly is; "a new lump, as ye are unleavened". At the feast of unleavened bread (Exod. 12), no leaven was: -

"to be eaten" – Assimilation; in the Heart. You become like the food you eat.

"to be seen" – Occupation; in the House. What you watch.

"to be in all thy borders" – Association; in the Habitation. The company you keep.

### 4. TO DISPLAY AUTHORITY

(1Cor. 11:3) "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God". To display the headship of Christ in the scene of His rejection is the distinction of assembly testimony. This is a matter of primary importance for every assembly member. The "head" indicates authority and hence relationship, representation, responsibility, rule and consequent subjection. "The head of every man is Christ;" is the spiritual relationship in Grace. "The head of the woman is the man;" is authority and rule vested in man. This is not a husband and wife relationship nor are unbelievers considered here. "The head of Christ is God" is viewed as in His incarnate manhood in relation to God's will. This does not teach superiority or inferiority.

(1Cor. 11:4) "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head (physical) covered dishonoureth (to disgrace, to put to shame) his head" (spiritual). "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head (physical) uncovered dishonoureth her head (spiritual): for that is even all one as if she were shaven" (11:5). She disgraces the man by proclaiming her independence and allows man to be seen in the presence of God. At Corinth it seems that the women were presuming that because they were equal in Christ with the men, they could act in the same way. In Ch. 11:4-5, the apostle corrects what is actually happening at Corinth. In Ch. 14:35 the apostle states the normal and correct scriptural order; "it is a shame for women to speak in the church". In a similar way, eating in the idols temple is mentioned in Ch. 8:10, but disallowed in Ch. 10:20-22.

(1Cor. 11:6) "For if the woman be not covered (persists in unveiling herself) let her also be shorn (cut short): but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven (complete removal), let her be covered". This could not mean that if a woman have no hair let her cut her hair, so a second covering must be introduced, a covering as distinct from her natural covering. Her hair must be covered so as to conceal; "the glory of the man" (v7). The shorn head of a woman indicated unfaithfulness, so the uncovered woman violates spiritually her God given relationship.

(1Cor. 11:7-13) Subsequent verses in this section teach that man in his spiritual exercises, his function in the presence of God, is "the image and glory of God", that is the visible representation of God. This "glory", the outshining of excellence, should not be covered in the presence of God. "The woman is the glory of [the] man". The glory of man has no place in the gathering of the saints of God. The woman has been brought in to share the glory of the man in a supporting role. The authority of the man is not independent of the woman. These verses balance the teaching to establish mutual dependence. In no way is the woman inferior. The authority of the man is not independent of the woman. The submission of the woman is not dispensable to the man. (v11) "In the Lord", where His authority is owned and displayed, what a privilege! (v12) "All things of God", as ordered by God, the display of His purpose and counsels.

(1Cor. 11:14-15) "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering". The teaching from nature shows what is fitting, instinctive seemly and proper. Masculinity in women or femininity in men are both repulsive. The words "covered" or "cover", 3 times in vv. 6-7, means, to fully cover, and in the primary sense means conceal. The covering is not to be transparent and it covers the head not just part of it. The word "covering" (v15) is a different word meaning, that which is thrown around; a robe, a vesture as a woman's hair is a covering which can be arranged in different ways. Therefore the woman has a twofold covering, temporary (v5), permanent (v15). "Have long hair", (v15) is not a relative word, not a question of how long in measurement, but as given her by the Lord. Hence it is a unique, beautiful display of her love and devotion to the Lord Who died for her. All her hair in its natural length and colour is given to her as her glory. "It is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering". The Gospel has elevated womanhood to a place of honour, dignity and loveliness not given to her in heathendom. The sister has this unique honour to adorn the assembly with the beauty of godly submission to her Lord. Heaven sets the style in the assembly and "angels" (v10) look on.

#### 5. TO ATTEND REGULARLY

"When ye come together". "When ye are gathered together". Such expressions occur seven times in 1Corinthians (cf. 5:4; 11:17,18,20,33; 14:23,26). "The church of God which is at Corinth" (1Cor. 1:2) met together in one location, not many locations. The gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit and the function of spiritual gifts are only to be experienced directly by bodily attending the then present meeting. To be present when the teaching of the Word is given in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit and to know the presence of the Lord Himself is an experience not to be missed. The spiritual atmosphere of such a gathering can never be recaptured on electronically recorded media. We cannot habitually absent ourselves from the assembly Bible Reading or Prayer meeting and yet claim to continue steadfastly, "in the apostles doctrine (this comes first because it is the very basis of our fellowship) and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). How can we encourage one another and exhort one another and not have face to face fellowship?

Every member of the assembly, both young and old, should be present at every meeting, as health and circumstances permit. Thomas missed the meeting and spent a miserable eight days doubting (John 20:24-28). Martha was late for the meeting and was bitter in spirit toward her sister who already, "sat at Jesus feet, and heard His Word" (Luke 10:38-42). When the weary travellers on the road to Emmaus got a sight of the risen Lord, they immediately went back to the meeting where they, "found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, the Lord is risen indeed" (Luke 24:33-34). Do not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

#### 6. TO SEEK TO EDIFY

(1Cor. 14:26) "How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine ... Let all things be done unto edifying". (14:40) "Let all things be done decently and in order". The "brethren" are addressed four times in this chapter (vv. 6,20,26,39). The context is the operation of gifts, hence public speaking. If I take part verbally in a public meeting of the Lord's people, it must meet the two tests of edification and order. I must seek to use God given ability wisely, not to draw attention to myself but to "edification" (build up), "exhortation" (stir up) and to "comfort" (bind up) others (14:3). This means we must be under the authority, control and restraint of the Holy Spirit.

The saints need to be edified, built up in their most holy faith. This means that if my voice is to be heard publicly and to be profitable, it will be the result of prayerful exercise, private study and previous meditation on the Word of God in the sanctuary before God. There must not be one man ministry or any man ministry. In the human body, there are many members each having their own function. In the assembly, there should be unity, diversity, harmony and interdependency, to fulfil the responsibility given to us by the Lord in relation to one another. Sign gifts have ceased (1Cor. 13:8). Seven gifts remain; prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and showing mercy (Rom. 12:6-8). When the believers meet, have I got anything profitable to give to them? I am either a help or a hindrance. The



greatest gift makes me only a servant. All contributions must be given in a fitting, becoming manner marked by godly "order".

#### 7. TO VALUE SIMPLICITY

(2Cor. 1:12) "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly, to you-ward". The assembly will be preserved in testimony if each individual diligently seeks to live a life of simple faith and communion with God. When Paul wrote these words he had lived with a clear conscience and holiness of life before the Corinthians for eighteen months. It is essential to live with transparency of motive that will bear the closest scrutiny. "Fleshly wisdom" will introduce religious titles, sacraments, vestments, solos, choirs and instruments attractive to the flesh which are the discarded remnants of popery. The "grace of God", will adorn the gathering, not by sisters wearing jewellery or outrageous apparel, but the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit which is highly esteemed in God's sight rather than man's esteem.

These inward virtues are very precious and are of intrinsic value which get more beautiful with the passing of years. Our delight should be to promote and maintain "simplicity". This is the opposite to human organisation and fleshly boasting in great numbers and social excitement. We should aim to be models, not of outward fashion but saintly devotion, and inward confidence and faith in God. The disciples first met with the Lord in an "upper room furnished". We require to bring our Bible to read. We need water to baptise. The Lord ordained a simple cup and bread as memorials of His death. We do not need to carry in equipment or instruments to furnish the gathering but simple love and obedience to our blessed Lord.

#### 8. TO ALLOW LIBERTY

(2Cor. 3:17) "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty". In this section Paul rejoices in the ministry of the new covenant. In contrast to the bondage and death of the "ministration of condemnation" we have the liberty of spiritual power which brings life, peace and liberty to enter into the presence of God. The passage teaches that the glory of the Lord has beamed upon us; the veil is done away in Christ; in the energy of that Spirit operating in us, "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" (3:18). Beholding by faith the risen majestic Christ, we enter the presence of God in the good of holy priesthood and the liberty of the Holy Spirit in the actual present meeting.

All meetings are for praise, prayer or preaching and are spiritual exercises. Organisation and human arrangement hinder this most blessed function. We will be preserved by giving opportunity for God to speak to us and for the risen Head to lead us in this liberty. God will speak to us from His Word through His servants. He will communicate to us what we need which may not always be what we want. We will leave the meeting having been occupied with Christ and the message, not just impressed with the messenger.

#### 9. TO SEPARATE SCRIPTURALLY

(2Cor. 6:14) "Be ye not unequally (diversely) yoked together with unbelievers". To be "yoked" is to be rigidly fixed, have a common commitment leaving one with no freedom for independent action. "For what fellowship (participation, partnership) hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" This is separation in Business Life; legally binding commitments in the Commercial World.

"And what communion (common state of mind, enjoy the same portion) hath light with darkness?" Light and darkness are opposites, mixture produces confusion. This is separation in Community Life from that which the believer cannot voluntarily enjoy in the Political World.

(2Cor. 6:15) "And what concord (harmony, sound together) hath Christ with Belial?" The believer is out of tune with the heathen environment that rejects Christ in his or her Personal Life. This applies to the Social World.

"Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel (unbeliever)?" The believer has no "part" (portion,

shared interests, do not share the same portion, do not share the same dish) with the unbeliever. This is the danger of an unequal yoke in Home Life; the Matrimonial World.

(2Cor. 6:16) "And what agreement (alliance, consent) hath the temple of God with idols?" The believer in assembly fellowship does not fit in with that which bows to false gods or gathers to any name other than our Lord Jesus Christ. They maintain separation in Assembly Life; separated from the Religious World.

(2Cor. 6:17-18) "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty". This is not a legal call to drive us out. It is a blessed invitation, "come" (outward separation), "touch not the unclean thing" (cleansed inward), do not bring anything with you to "touch". The danger is defilement and Babylonish captivity of soul. The Lord is rejected. You will find Him outside the camp. Let us come forth, go out to Him. The recompense for this costly path is to know the dignified relationship of "sons and daughters" of Jehovah.

#### 10. TO GIVE LIBERALLY

(2Cor. 9:6-7) "But this I say, He that 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". The grace of giving is developed by the apostle with inspired wisdom. In these chapters there is no hint of an appeal or begging for material support.

Grace is stressed in the need of Jewish believers being met by Gentile assemblies. The words used to describe the exercise of giving of our material blessings are to be noted: "Grace" (8:1 – favour); "fellowship" (8:4 – sharing); "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (8:9); "ready mind" (8:19); "abundance" (8:20 – copious); "bounty" (9:5 – blessing); "sowing" (9:6 – increase); "ministration" (9:12 – service); "gift" (9:15 – free bestowal).

Attitude is more important than Amount. Our giving should be: -

cheerful; "not grudgingly", not by levy, pressure, allowance or salary.

careful; "purposeth in his heart".

cordial; "not of necessity", not of external compulsion or statutory requirements.

This liberality will be glorifying to God, unite givers and receivers, share in the increase through the Gospel and be in harmony with the Greatest of all Givers. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (9:15). The question is not how much we should give, but can we hold anything back?

#### 11. TO WAIT EXPECTANTLY

(1Cor. 15:51-52) "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed". There is no greater incentive to personal exercise and individual godly living than to have a firm conviction of the truth of the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ and our rapture to meet Him in the air. We serve in this mortal body in view of our changed body. This will not be the reassembled former body, nor the resuscitation of this body, nor the resumption of material existence but the transformation of the natural body to immortal life when "this corruptible (if dead) shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal (if living) shall have put on immortality". The "mystery" is not resurrection but the fact that not all believers will die. "Death" vanquished by superior power will be forced to yield the bodies of the saints. The rapture will conclude the church period on earth. We have "victory through our Lord Jesus Christ". By dying, He dealt with sin, in resurrection He vanquished death. The law is robbed of its power, sin of its strength and death of its victory.

#### 12. TO LABOUR FERVENTLY

(1Cor. 15:58) "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord". This is a powerful appeal in

spite of all our weaknesses. “Steadfast” means to be fixed in heart, settled in motive, marked by firm conviction. The believer who is not easily disturbed by false teaching will be a steady, stable dependable brother or sister in the assembly. “Unmoveable” means that one will not be easily shifted or turned aside under assault or attack by unscriptural practices. “Abounding” in power and energy focused upon the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our manifestation at the Judgement Seat. “Work of the Lord;” what is done. If we are to do anything we do not have long to do it. “Labour”, how it is done. Surely we should toil until fatigue. “Not in vain in the Lord”, this is the quality of our work, we should labour fervently from the assembly with a view to the building up of the assembly.

In these 8 Papers we have considered the Scriptural PRINCIPLES, PATTERN, PRACTISES, PRIVILEGES, PROGRESS, PURITY and PRESERVATION of a New Testament assembly. Let us very seriously consider the inspired word to the believers at Corinth. “But let every man (1<sup>st</sup> ref.) take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1Cor. 3:10-11) “Every man’s (2<sup>nd</sup> ref.) work shall be made manifest (become visible, the service rendered, the material contributed): for the day shall declare it (make plain, make evident what is concealed at present), because it shall be revealed by (in) fire (penetrating, discernment, true assessment); and the fire shall try every man’s (3<sup>rd</sup> ref.) work of what sort it is” (1Cor. 3:13).

Let us each labour to contribute, not bulk (wood, hay, stubble) but value (gold, silver, precious stones) (1Cor. 3:12) that the local lampstand may be preserved to shine brightly until the Lord comes.

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## MISINTERPRETED TEXTS

### 1Corinthians 15:29 – “Baptized for the dead”

In connection with the significance of baptism, the 29<sup>th</sup> verse of 1Corinthians 15 has been usually understood to refer to a certain ceremony which took place on the occasion of the burial of a believer. In view, however, of the absence of any other intimation in Scripture regarding such a ceremony, and the absence of any historical evidence thereof, another meaning must be sought. Bearing in mind that the original was written without punctuation marks, let the first question mark in the verse be placed after the word “baptized”, and the verse gives a meaning at once consistent with the doctrine of Scripture. The reading will be: “Else what shall they do which are baptized? It is for (i.e., ‘in the interest of’) the dead, if the dead are not raised at all. Why then are they baptized for them?”

The question, “What shall they do ...?” is a way of asking what is the use or value of being baptized. The insertion of words “It is”, to provide the answer, is consistent with the frequent omission of the verb “to be” in the original, as is shown by the italicized words in several places in this chapter. If there is no resurrection of the dead, the ordinance, instead of setting forth the identification of believers with the risen Christ, has no meaning at all either for Him or for them; for all perish at death: see verse 18. Both His command and their witness in the ordinance are null and void, and their baptism is in the interests of dead ones.

On the contrary, the testimony given in baptism abides as a power day by day for life. The believer declares that he or she is dead to self with its desires and lusts, dead to the world and its friendships and aspirations (for he who would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God, James 4:4 R.V.), and testifies to the experience of the power of life in Christ, instead of the motive power of sin and self. How solemn is the confession, and yet how blessed! How binding the obligation and yet how holy! How marvellous this identification with the risen Lord Jesus! May our life be ever consistent with the witness.

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4)

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## Get to Know Your Bible

### **NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 1.**

The New Testament comprises of 27 books, covering a period of 90 years, written by 8 inspired writers. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2Tim. 3:16). The N.T. completes the canon of scripture received by the verbal inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the full canon, we possess all that is necessary to make us wise unto salvation and to be fully equipped for godly living. “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” (2Tim. 3:16-17).

#### OUTLINE:

The object of these papers is to give a simple outline of each of the Books of the Bible easily understood by the average believer to help him or her to go back to the Bible for themselves to become a serious student of the Word of God. Knowledge of the Word of God is not enough. There must be the practical application to everyday life and personal obedience to what is revealed.

Knowledge is essential but we may need to confess that we already know more than we are prepared to obey. May the Spirit of God Who inspired the scriptures illuminate the mind and stir the heart of each reader to know God as revealed in His Son through His Word and to work it out practically in our daily lives.

The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the key to all our Bible. The Christ of Prophecy in the Old Testament becomes the Historical Christ in the Gospels, the Christ of Truth in the Epistles and the Lord Jesus Christ of Prophetic Glory in the book of Revelation.

In the Books of Moses, Christ is Foreshadowed.

In the Historical books of the O.T., Christ is found in the Figures.

In the Poetical books, we enter into some truth of the Feelings of Christ.

In the Prophets, Christ is Foretold.

In the Gospels, we learn the historical Facts.

In the Acts, Christ is Forth-told.

In the doctrines of the Epistles, Christ is the Foundation.

In the Book of the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, we behold His Future Glory.

#### TESTAMENT:

The word “Testament” translated “covenant” basically means a covenant relationship, a pact, an alliance between God and His people.

The word “canon” means a rule by which something is measured or evaluated. The canon of the N.T. is the

collection of inspired books. Should all the twenty seven books be there? Are there any other books that should be included? The Divine Author of the N.T. is the Holy Spirit. He inspired the human authors Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude and the anonymous author of Hebrews to write these books. Godly and discerning disciples recognised the inspired scriptures from the commencement.

Peter recognised Paul's writings (2Pet. 3:15-16). Divine control kept human writers from making any errors. If a book was written by an apostle such as Matthew, Peter, John or Paul or by one within the apostolic circle such as Mark and Luke, there was no doubt about the books canonicity and this very limitation excluded any heretical writings. Also the original readers in the churches knew the authors so well they had no doubt about the writers, even of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The O.T. was written over a millennium (1400-400BC). The N.T. was written in about 50 years (50-100AD) soon after the Lord's death and resurrection.

#### BOOKS:

The order of the books of the N.T. were not written in the sequence of writing but in the order suited to the need of the church. It commences with the Person and Work of Christ on earth. It continues with the spread of the Gospel and then gives doctrine and instructions to the church and the local assemblies and finally reveals the future of the churches, the bride, the nation and the nations.

The first epistles, James, Galatians and Thessalonians were written to younger believers near the middle of the first century. The other epistles were written to address specific needs in the local assemblies as they arose. Possibly the order of the writings of the Gospels was Matthew or Mark first, then Luke next, then John's writings to refute serious errors with regard to the Deity and Humanity of Christ toward the end of the first century AD.

#### LANGUAGE:

The O.T. was written in the expressive, warm, colourful Hebrew language befitting to the poetry, prophesy and narrative of past ages. The N.T. is written with the precision of verb tenses, grammar, vocabulary of the Greek language as spoken by the mass of the people in the then known world. Down through the years, God has overruled by raising up godly, devout, spiritual and learned men to give us extremely literal accurate translations of the original text. Some of these dear men laid down their lives in martyrdom to give us the communication of God's mind in the majesty and beauty of the original literal words of the inspired script in our own mother tongue. Modern free interpretations which abandon accurate style and ideas, introduce dangerous trends which obscure the fulfilment of many Messianic prophecies and undermine the Deity and perfect humanity of Christ are to be avoided. A paraphrase which seeks to transmit the text to modern thinking and to evangelise with an appeal which abandons the complete accuracy of translation from the authentic original text, is very unsafe.

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## Preaching the Gospel

**“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:15)**

“The preaching of the gospel is not a barren statement of mere evangelical doctrine. It is not a form of words enunciated over and over again in wearisome routine – far from it! To preach the gospel is to unfold the heart of God and the greatness of the Person and work of Christ in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, from the exhaustless treasury of Holy Scripture.”  
(C.H. Mackintosh)

Preaching the gospel is unfolding the *heart* of God. Communication through *preaching* is the most powerful

method indeed. Preaching is indispensable to the very character of the gospel for the salvation it has to bring about (1Cor. 1:17-18). “Jesus came... *preaching*” (Mark 1:14). “Preach the Word” (2Tim. 4:2) is the commandment given to every servant of God. Without preaching the gospel we cannot serve God. “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe ...” (1Cor. 1:21-23). God has ordained preaching as the divine method, by which individuals can be brought to the fold of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:14,15). We are commanded to preach (Mark 16:15).

God is a talking God. He spoke and by His word the heavens and the earth were created. Throughout the ages He spoke through His many prophets, and finally in and through His Son Jesus Christ. Today He speaks to mankind through His written Word. We are commanded to echo what He has spoken. Hence it is our paramount obligation to preach the word.

Since God has chosen preaching as a method to communicate the gospel, He has not given the responsibility to angels or to any other heavenly creatures, but only to man for whom this gospel is intended. Preaching is heralding of the gospel, that good news to mankind, by a messenger sent of God and chosen from among them.

### **The Gospel is to be Preached**

*We are to preach the gospel.* “How shall they hear without a *preacher*? – make a public declaration – And how shall they preach, except they be *sent*?” (Rom. 11:14-15). Here the word “to preach” and “preacher” are derived from the Greek word “*kerusso*” indicating a public declaration of a herald. The same word is also used by Paul when he wrote, “But we *preach* Christ crucified” (1Cor. 1:23). This word is used in the New Testament as many as 61 times. It is the same word “preach” in the great commission of our Lord (Mark 16:15). It means a *public declaration* by a herald, that is, an evangelist who proclaims the gospel. The Holy Spirit is very careful in choosing to use the right word. When Philip proclaimed the gospel individually to the Ethiopian on the desert road, the Greek word “*evangelizo*” is used, which means “to evangelize” (Acts 8:35), and this is not the word meaning “to preach” to a crowd.

When God wanted to reach His chosen people, the Jews, with this glorious gospel, it was intimated to them only by *preaching* (Acts 2). Similarly, when God revealed the gospel to the Gentiles, the apostle Peter was sent to the house of Cornelius, and there too the gospel was introduced to them only by *preaching* (Acts 10). It is of vital importance to present the gospel “one to one” and silently through our everyday living; however, God’s supreme way to reach souls is by the preaching of the gospel. To be a vessel chosen of God to preach the gospel is the greatest honour that can be conferred on any man. The Christian pulpit has exerted far-reaching and deep influences on human society.

Once a veteran evangelist was conducting a series of gospel meetings in a town. He, along with a young man, who was also a servant of God, went to visit a lady who was living in a house next to the school where they were conducting the meetings. She had not attended any of the meetings thus far, but she was showing some interest. On their first visit the evangelist gave her a clear explanation on how man is ruined in sin, and that God’s only remedy is the precious shed blood of Christ on the cross. This did not seem to have an impact on that lady. When leaving that house, he turned and said to the young man, “That dear lady needs to hear the gospel preached in public”. The young man was puzzled, since she had already heard the full message of the gospel in this private visit. The servant of God then patiently explained how God uses “*the preached word*” to bring about conviction and awakening to a soul. God’s method is for an evangelist to speak emphatically as a herald. If the gospel is thus preached and declared publicly, Christ is honoured. Have we realized the spiritual implication of the public proclamation of the gospel?

A story is told about an incident in Kerala, India, during the ministry of Sadhu Sunder Singh, when he visited that State. A high caste, ***Namboodiri*** called on Sunder Singh on a particular night, where he was staying and wanted to know about the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. He wanted to avoid people of his community discovering his interest in seeking the Lord. Inferring this, Sadhu Sunder Singh, however declined to explain the gospel to this high-caste man in privacy. He told him that His Master the Lord Jesus Christ hung on that cruel cross at Calvary before the public glare, and at the middle of the day. He thus suffered public ignominy

for each individual. He told him to attend the public meeting arranged next day at the appointed place. The story goes that this man did attend Sadhu Sunder Singh's public preaching of the gospel, and was wonderfully saved by the grace of God. Thereafter, he lived as a faithful witness to his Lord and Master for the rest of his lifetime.

When we look back on history, we see clearly how spiritual revival came about and how many thousands of people were brought into the fold of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the preaching of Martin Luther, and many others of this generation. John Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon and Gipsy Smith in England; D.L. Moody and several others in America. Numerous other preachers who are not so well known to the outside world have also proved this divine truth throughout history.

It is indeed sad that the glory of public preaching has almost departed from the Christian ministry. This is an age of show-business and entertainment. There is more entertainment that fills the pulpits than preachers preaching the gospel of the cross. Psychological appeal is being favoured. Let us reject this trend and return to the biblical pattern of preaching.

Nowadays, in many countries, preaching the gospel in public places and in the open-air is either being prohibited, or considered unethical. People dislike listening to such preaching. But we should not forget that preaching the gospel on public places and in auditoriums and other places has a great impact on the needy and hungry souls. It expels the "power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), and the darkness from the hearts of men. The preaching of the gospel breaks down the stronghold of Satan. We should not lose sight of the vital fact.

### **The Gospel is also for Christians**

The two major New Testament epistles written to the churches at Rome and Galatia, contain the full treatise of the precious gospel. These epistles very clearly teach the order and functions of a local assembly. They deal with three major themes – the cross of Christ, the church of God and the coming of the Lord. If these gospel truths are not valuable to the believers, that is the Christians, then for whom are these epistles written? As Christians, we must be saturated with the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and with these precious truths of the gospel.

Scripture verses such as Romans 1:13-15 and 1Thessalonians 1:8 make it amply clear that the preaching of the gospel as part of the *church testimony* is the plan of God. Without preaching the gospel a local church cannot survive. *The church exists to preach the gospel*. A dear servant of the Lord graphically puts it, "If the church does not win 'new blood', she will die". The evangelist through the preaching accomplishes more than reaching the sinners. The evangelist is one of the gifts, given by the risen Lord, "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

### **The Gospel Changes Lives and Saves Souls**

The preaching of the gospel is a must for a Christian. We are saddened and even baffled to note that in many places where the preaching of the gospel was once a regular practice, it has now been stopped. Two excuses most often given for this failure are: 1) There is no meaning in preaching the gospel to a Christian congregation. 2) A personal presentation of the gospel to individuals on a soul-to-soul basis is by far the most effective method.

When the local church preaches the gospel, souls are saved and lives are transformed. When precious souls come under the sound of the gospel message, they are generally convicted of their sin and see the eternal light shine in their sin-stricken, devil-controlled, darkened souls. It is a time of real blessing. In many cases broken marriage ties are restored, homes are secured and peace and harmony are installed. New souls are added to the local church, bringing spiritual joy into the body of Christ.

### **The Gospel Promotes Joy and Worship**

When the gospel is preached with earnestness, souls are saved, and spiritual interest is generated that results in godliness. A breeze of spiritual freshness fills the air. This brings joy both to those souls that are saved and to His people in the local church.

When Christ and the cross are preached, our souls are warmed and we are revived. We are able to experience the warmth of God's grace covering us with a new light and in a new perspective. Our hearts are filled with thanks to God and it promotes worship, and we confess, "How good is the God we adore", and "His mercy endureth for ever"

### **The Gospel Perpetuates Christian Behaviour**

When the gospel is preached simply and clearly, with spiritual warmth, it revives God's people. It rekindles the joy of salvation and renews the wonder of the divine grace extended to sinners such as we. A normal Christian life should bubble with the constraining love to preach the gospel, and should rejoice when it is preached to others. This contributes to a healthy heart condition among His people.

The gospel takes us back to the cross and to our own conversion experience. It impresses on us the realities of eternity in contrast to the ephemeral (short-lived) things of time and of this world, giving us a fresh personal insight into the plight of the eternally lost souls. It drives us to our knees to pray for the unsaved.

Believers in Christ often become "puffed up for one against another" (1Cor. 4:6), and seek to glorify men (1Cor. 3:21). Often envy, strife and divisions creep in (1Cor. 3:3). Cultural, caste and language barriers may develop. But the "preaching of the cross" will put an end to all these evils. The cross would conquer all cultural and personal bias. The truth of the gospel would set the tenor of their entire Christian life. Hearing the gospel preaching brings one to his real "roots". *Oneness of mind and unity of the spirit* would result because of the common interest in the gospel among His people. When the *cross* and the *Lord* become the central focus and occupation of the local church, all ills are healed.

The apostle Paul longed for this kind of spiritual development among the Galatian saints (Gal. 4:19). He exhorted them to "walk in the Spirit" (5:16), that would result in Christ-likeness (5:22,23) in their personal lives. We are admonished "to walk together in the Spirit" (5:25 literal). It is interesting to note that the apostle takes them back to the moment of their salvation and asks, "Having *begun* in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (3:3). The truth of the gospel has to *continue* among His people (Gal. 2:5). If the content of the gospel message were altered, the entire character of Christian living would be affected. Listening to the true presentation of the gospel will make us *dependent* on the Lord; and teach us to fully *yield* to the same Spirit who first revealed Christ to us. The gospel therefore keeps us fully *dependent* on the Lord and on His redemptive work.

Seeing souls saved and added to the church encourages us to set new goals in our Christian living. Guiding new believers and nurturing them in the Lord is a joyful experience. As we care for them, we strive to set a good example before them. This helps us to re-examine our lives, lest our footsteps lead the young lambs astray.

The gospel that glorifies God and honours Christ, likewise affects all aspects of the assembly testimony. Gospel work, whether regular or special campaigns, is essential for the glory of God and for the building up of the testimony of the local church.

### **The Gospel Promotes Knowledge of God**

We have a great gospel heritage. Gifted evangelists have preached the gospel with the power of God and as a result God has been pleased to save many souls. To effectively present the sound gospel, the preacher has to study the word of God, understand its lofty principles, and memorize verses so that he can unfold the gospel truth in a orderly and scriptural way. Such a study broadens his *knowledge* of the word of God and the Holy Spirit widens his *understanding* of the divine doctrinal truths. *Gospel preaching promotes spiritual growth*. Those of God's children who hear the gospel preached in the right spiritual way, are warmed in their hearts. They gain new thoughts and insight into the word of God which can be developed and used profitably.

### **The Gospel Develops Gift**

When evangelists preach the gospel, souls are saved and new assemblies are established. Believers are exercised in the ministry when they come forward to take up new responsibilities. They are exercised to



commit their lives to the Lord's work, and thus the gifts given to them by God are stirred up.

When the gospel is preached clearly and in the power of the Holy Spirit, His people are exercised to serve the Lord, obey the Lord's great commission, and to help smaller churches scattered in the area. It creates an interest among the young men for door-to-door visitation, and to reach out to the villages. The gift of an evangelist is received at one's conversion, but that gift must be developed (1Tim. 4:14). Without taking up regular opportunities to preach the gospel, there can never be development. Open-air preaching offers a good opportunity for such exercise.

### **The Gospel Promotes Evangelism**

Evangelistic work revives His people. The demands of everyday living could easily blur our vision of eternal realities. The preaching of the gospel reminds us that those around us are perishing souls. The Spirit of God works during such preaching and as souls are saved, Christians learn God's ways of bringing sinners to repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). It stimulates a burden for souls. Weekly gospel meetings and gospel camps and such series develop the gospel zeal of the local church. Christians feel greater liberty to invite friends and relatives to such meetings. They motivate and equip us in the true gospel testimony so necessary for local church growth.

### **The Gospel Preserves the Doctrine**

The content of the gospel establishes the standard of true and sound doctrine. Our teaching of divine truths can never be contrary to the truths declared in the gospel. Our gospel preaching ought not to be doctrinaire, but it must be doctrinal and free from heresies. A faithful presentation of God's character, the nature of man, and the glorious Person of our Lord Jesus Christ provide a strong basis for the development of sound doctrine. All doctrine, no matter how profound, contributes to the consistency of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we first came to know through the gospel. If our doctrine denies or complicates the truths of the gospel we preach, it will go astray. 'It will become another kind of (another of a different kind) gospel' (Gal. 1:9). History has proved that those who love to preach the gospel have given fresh, pertinent and wholesome teaching from the word of God. An assembly is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim. 3:15). The truths that we believe and preach comprise a body of teaching, that is, "the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42), and "the faith ... once for all delivered" (Jude 3).

Man's fallen condition and the futility of his self-efforts, God's divine plan of redemption, Christ's virgin birth and sinlessness, and His righteous purity, His Sonship, His vicarious death on the cursed cross, His death, His resurrection from among the dead, His ascension to the right-hand of God and His exaltation above all powers and principalities, as well as His coming again to take His own and to establish His kingdom and finally His Great White Throne judgment are all part and parcel of this glorious gospel. If we cease to preach these truths, we may soon lose them. History has proved this too, most emphatically. May we be faithful in proclaiming this glorious gospel for the salvation of many! Let us be faithful to the generation to which we belong and set an example for the one to follow.

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## **The Old Paths**

Selected as written in 1950 by the late Mr A.W. Joyce

In a bygone day and a past generation, servants of Christ who gave all their time to the work of the Lord were, generally speaking, leaders of God's people in the right ways of the Lord, and as "he-goats before the flock". By the faithful ministry of the Word and by a consistent walk, they taught and led the assemblies in

the path of separation to a rejected Lord from a godless world. The overseeing brethren in the assemblies followed the instruction and example thus set before them, and, in turn, taught the assemblies along the same lines, and God blessed and prospered them.

It would seem that in the present day, to a large extent, this leadership seems to be absent. The writer has been very much impressed of late with the number of conference notices sent for insertion in the magazine in which expressions like the following are used: "Servants of the Lord, teaching and practising the 'old paths' will be welcome to minister the Word". WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT NECESSARY TO INCLUDE THESE WORDS IN THE NOTICES?

While it is a cause for thanksgiving that so many in these difficult days desire scriptural paths of separation, there is also certainly a solemn lesson to be drawn from this by those who go before God's people as preachers. Instead of it being the preachers who are leading aright and restraining the flock from wandering into by paths, does this suggest that the flock have to restrain some leaders from wandering? Do these notices not carry a rebuke to us? Should they not call for a re-consideration of the ministry being given by us and of the path our feet are treading?

The expression has been used, "I am the Lord's freeman: and will not be dictated to as to where I go." But is there anything in the Word of God to encourage a "liberty" that is a cause of grief, stumbling-block and even division among the assemblies and the people of God who commended us to the work, and whose fellowship has supported us in the past? If one demands for himself a "liberty" which has caused trouble, and dissension among the saints, he will find that his "liberty" has caused him to forfeit the *confidence* of the saints. There is no use then in castigating the assemblies for their lack of love and fellowship which has been lost by the attitude or behaviour of the preacher.

It is true that for the exercised servant of God there should always be that true liberty to put the will of God FIRST and he should never degenerate into becoming a mere servant of man. But the will of God and the path of His choosing will not be one that will distress the godly, bring discord into the assemblies and lead to a fraternizing with the world in its schemes and innovations.

Some excuse their going to certain places on the plea that faithful ministry is needed and will correct the things that are wrong. When such go, do they give that faithful, corrective ministry? Are unscriptural things plainly spoken against? – the open table, the lack of discipline, the reception of erring ones who have been scripturally disciplined in other assemblies, adult camps and Bible schools, music, the closed platform etc. If this ministry were given and resented, would the preacher be invited back? If this ministry has been given and accepted, why has it not produced definite, evident results in the recovery of such gatherings?

Some dismiss the expression "The Old Paths" with a shrug or a smile. But is it not in the Book? Do we not read: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word" (Isaiah 66:2)? Some may say, it all depends on what is meant by the old paths. "How old are the Old Paths?" They were as old as "our fathers" who pioneered and planted the assemblies and taught us in our early days the precious truths of the Word of God. But most important of all, they were as old as the Holy Scriptures in which these paths are contained and unfolded.

"What are the Old Paths?" We see that the Old Path for the individual was the Path of Fellowship with God, which has been trodden by the faithful from the days of Enoch and Noah in Genesis 5 and 6. It is the Path of separation from darkness, from the evil, from self-will, which is taught from the beginning of the Book, when God divided the light from the darkness, to the Book of Revelation. For the assemblies of God today, it is the Path of Obedience and Subjection to the New Testament precepts and principles, and adherence to the PATTERN for the assemblies of God to which we should cleave until our blessed Lord returns.

Some seem to think that the "Unity" of all professed assemblies is the all important goal to which we should strive, even if that so called "Unity" is obtained by the sacrifice of truth and the compromise of Divine principles. Every exercised Christian should earnestly endeavour to promote the greatest possible fellowship between the assemblies which are Scripturally gathered to the precious Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but a union with departure from the truth of God can never be God's way or the path of His leading.

God's way of unity is by getting closer to Christ as revealed in His word, as His people get closer to each other. As the rays of light which are spread over all the earth, the higher men were to ascend up them towards the sun, the nearer they would get to each other. So by more hearty identification with Christ, and close following of His Word, do Christians become increasingly knit to one another.

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## Out of Date?

"You're just out of date," said young pastor Bate  
To one of our faithful old preachers;  
Who had carried for years, in travail and tears,  
The gospel to poor sinful creatures.

"You still preach on Hades, and shock cultured ladies  
"With your barbarous doctrine of blood!  
"You're so far behind you will never catch up –  
"You're a flat tyre stuck in the mud!"

For some little while, a bit of a smile  
Enlightened the old preacher's face,  
Being made the butt of ridicule's cut  
Did not ruffle his sweetness and grace.

Then he turned to young Bate, so suave and sedate,  
"Catch up, did my ears hear you say?  
"Why, I couldn't succeed if I doubled my speed,  
"Young friend, I'm not going your way!"

*Author Unknown*

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## The Fruit of the Spirit

Continuation of the article from TOP № 21.

### **Longsuffering**

The quality and grace of being longsuffering, that is patient, is part of that nine-fold cluster of fruit which is produced in a believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Evidence of the development of this quality in a believer is shown by the way that believer reacts in trying circumstances. If a believer is longsuffering, he will not entertain thoughts of retaliation or revenge on those who may have caused him problems. God is longsuffering (Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Rom. 9:22). We read in Psalm 86:15, that God is "full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth". He is longsuffering with sinful men and women. We have an example of God's love, and patience when "the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing" (1Pet. 3:20). God is longsuffering and patient despite our sinfulness. In His love, kindness, goodness, forbearance and longsuffering, God delays the execution of His judgement, wrath and punishment for sin, thereby seeking to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). He is "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pet. 3:9).

The Lord Jesus Christ is longsuffering (2Pet. 3:15). The Lord “when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not” (1Pet. 2:23) and, after He had been mocked, tortured, spat upon and nailed to the cross, He prayed for His tormentors saying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The Lord was hated without a cause (John 15:25) but He did not hate His persecutors and murderers. He did not cause them to be punished or to suffer. He loved them and had come to bear the guilt and penalty of their sins. He had said “Love your enemies ... and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). He revealed His mercy, grace, compassion, longsuffering and His love for His enemies by praying for them.

Believers are encouraged to show longsuffering and patience as they seek to witness to the saving grace of God and live their lives in accordance with the will of God and to His glory (Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 1:10,11; 3:12-14; 2Tim. 4:2).

### **Gentleness**

There is true beauty in the fruit produced in a believer by the Holy Spirit, and the life, graces and virtues of a believer should soon be noticed by those with whom he comes into contact. The fruit produced is evidence of the life of the Spirit within and of the quality and character of that life, for “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matt. 7:16). Gentleness or kindness is a beautiful quality. When the Holy Spirit produces this grace in a believer it brings pleasure to those whom the believer meets.

In Titus 3:4 we read of “the kindness and love of God our Saviour”. God is kind to all even to those who are unthankful and those who are evil (Luke 6:35). The “meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2Cor. 10:1) are seen in the ways in which He dealt with people and spoke to them. We see His gentleness and kindness when He said, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). The Lord took these little children up in His arms and they were not afraid. He “put His hands upon them, and blessed them” (Mark 10:16).

Gentleness contrasts sharply with the works of the flesh such as hatred, variance, wrath, strife, envyings and murders (Gal. 5:19-21). The quality and grace of gentleness should affect and control all that a believer says and does. It is so easy to respond angrily to words that provoke. A gentle answer soothes angry feelings and turns away wrath, but a harsh answer stirs up anger (Prov. 15:1). True wisdom, “the wisdom that is from above”, is “peaceable, gentle ... full of mercy and good fruits” (James 3:17).

Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers that “we were gentle among you” (1Thess. 2:7). Writing to Timothy he said “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2Tim. 2:24). Believers are to be gentle, kind, longsuffering, compassionate and forgiving to one another (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12).

### **Goodness**

Goodness involves doing good to people, doing that which is kind, beneficial and helpful. God is infinitely, immutably, eternally and perfectly good (Matt. 19:17; Ps. 52:1). He is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Exod. 34:6). We read in the Psalms that “The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Ps. 145:9) and “the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD” (Ps. 33:5). He “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). In His goodness, God delays His punishment for sin so that people might repent and be saved (Rom. 2:4).

David wrote “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6). The Lord Jesus Christ “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). He could not do evil, for He is eternally God and God cannot sin (2Cor. 5:21; 1Pet. 2:22; 1John 3:5; Luke 1:35).

Trees are known by the fruits they produce (Matt. 7:15-20) and “every good tree bringeth forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:17). As the “fruit of the Spirit” is produced in a believer, so that fruit will be evident to other

people. Goodness will be seen in the life of a believer (Gal. 5:22,23; Eph. 5:9) and he will seek to do good for and to others, seeking their spiritual, mental and physical blessing and well-being. The believer should respond to the goodness of God by praising and thanking Him and by witnessing to others of His goodness (Ezra 8:22). In doing these things, the believer will please God and glorify Him.

## **Faith**

The Holy Spirit produces within a believer the grace and virtue of *faithfulness*. This faithfulness is seen as a characteristic of the believer's behaviour in relation to other people and this is the meaning, in the context of Galatians 5:22, of the word which is translated *faith* in the Authorized Version. A believer is to be faithful to God and should be reliable, trustworthy, loyal and faithful, and act in good faith to all with whom he comes in contact.

God is "the faithful God, which keepeth covenant" (Deut. 7:9). "God is faithful" (1Cor. 1:9) and can be trusted and relied upon by believers in all the changing circumstances of life. He is faithful and never changes (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17). The Lord Jesus Christ is "the faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5). He is "Faithful and True" (Rev. 19:11) and He is "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb. 2:17).

We are told in 1Corinthians 4:2 that "it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful". A steward is responsible for administering something he does not own. Believers are God's stewards. We are accountable for the stewardship of the gifts He bestows upon us and the resources He makes available to us. We are responsible as stewards, for the faithful use of our spiritual gifts, the measure of health and strength of body and mind which we enjoy, the opportunities for service we are given and the time, assets and financial resources made available to us. We should endeavour, as led and guided by the Holy Spirit, and as enabled and empowered by Him, to be "good and faithful stewards", remembering always that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).

The Holy Spirit dwelling within a believer (1Cor. 6:19) will produce the grace of faithfulness in that believer. A believer who is faithful will be faithful to God and seek to obey the Word of God. He will be faithful to other people and will make every effort to honour and carry out his obligations, responsibilities, duties and commitments to them.

## **Meekness**

The gracious Holy Spirit seeks to develop within a believer the quality and virtue of meekness. Meekness will show itself in the believer being submissive to the will of God and be seen in his demeanour and gentleness and in him not responding to provocations. It is often said that "meekness is not weakness". Meekness is power and strength under control. The infinitely powerful, pre-eminent and all-sufficient Lord Jesus Christ said of Himself, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). The meekness of The Lord was prophesied (Ps. 45:4; Isa. 53:7). That He would ride into Jerusalem on a colt had been prophesied and in Matthew 21:5 we read, "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass".

Lambs tend to be meek, submissive and gentle. The Lord was referred to as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Lord endured patiently the "contradiction of sinners against Himself" (Heb. 12:3). When He was reviled He did not retaliate and when He suffered He did not threaten (1Pet. 2:23). Paul, the apostle, wrote to the Corinthians, "I ... beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2Cor. 10:1).

Believers are not to be self-assertive, arrogant, nor conceited, but meek, submissive, gentle, mild and not given to outbursts of anger. Meekness does not mean sacrificing principles but being prepared to accept the will of God and to humbly give up personal wishes and preferences in order to serve God, benefit others and meet their needs. "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). Moses was meek but certainly was not weak. He was submissive to the will of God. The believer in whom the quality and grace of meekness is present will obey the teachings and precepts of the

Word of God (James 1:21). Being submissive to the revealed will of God gives the believer inner strength and peace. God promises that “The meek will He guide in judgement: and the meek will He teach His way” (Ps. 25:9). God will guide and teach those who are meek and humble. The meekness of a believer will be seen by people, to the glory of God.

For a believer to lead a life in which God will find pleasure, which will bring blessing to fellow-believers and be a good witness to those who have not been saved, the believer must show lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and love (Eph. 4:1,2; Col. 3:12,13). The believer should do all things in a spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1,2; 2Tim. 2:24,25; Tit. 3:2) and set his heart on righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness (1Tim. 6:11). True meekness is an outcome of love and is “not easily provoked” (1Cor. 13:5). The “ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (1Pet. 3:4) is very precious in the sight of God. Meekness does not come naturally or easily to many of us, however, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit will gradually develop this grace within us, to the glory of God.

### **Temperance**

The Holy Spirit seeks to develop within a believer the quality and virtue of temperance or self control. Temperance enables a believer, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to resist and overcome evil passions and cravings, and those desires and impulses which are not in accordance with the will of God and are therefore, sinful. Believers are told to “walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Sin need not master and control believers, for we have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1Cor. 6:19) with which to overcome sin (Rom. 6:14). The believer who exercises self-control will not be self-indulgent or indulge the old sinful nature (Gal. 5:13).

When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked “which is the great commandment in the law?” He answered, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:36-40). If we love other people we will be careful not to harm them in any way whatsoever (Rom. 13:8-10).

All the “law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Gal. 5:14). The deeds of the sinful nature, such as sexual immorality, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, jealousy, quarrelling, outbursts of temper, selfish ambition, envy, factions, drunkenness, orgies and the like (Gal. 5:19-21) contrast sharply with “the fruit of the Spirit” listed in Galatians 5:22,23. The qualities and graces produced by the Spirit, fulfil all the requirements of the law: they are beautiful virtues and “against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:23).

The Spirit enables an obedient believer to exercise temperance, that is, self control, and this grace should characterise a believer’s life (2Pet. 1:6). The believer, leading a disciplined life in the power of the Spirit, will experience victory over sin, enjoy the peace of God within, (Gal. 5:22,23; John 14:27; Phil. 4:7) and will escape “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2Pet. 1:4).

We are warned in the Word of God that, “in the last days perilous times shall come”, and we learn that one of the things which will characterise sinful people in these days will be that they will be “incontinent”, that is, they will have no self-control (2Tim. 3:1-4). In the days in which we live, sin is increasing on every hand, activities are being legalized which are contrary to the will of God and there is little restraint and self-control. However, through prayerful, Spirit led meditation on the Word of God, obeying God and “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2Cor. 10:5) the believer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will be enabled to exercise self-control and live and witness so that God will be glorified and the Lord Jesus Christ exalted.

Concluded

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# Help for Young Believers

## The Veterans Advise – No 3

This is the third reprint from the writings of a veteran brother who served the Lord for 48 years in South America.

### **“How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14)**

There are occasions when God speaks to men through circumstances which arise in their lives. Both saved and unsaved have been made to feel at such times that God is using that particular happening to reach their consciences and profit their souls. The unconverted person may be one who is familiar with the truths of the Gospel, but indifferent to the claims of Christ. God may use some circumstance to awaken him, to open his eyes to the enormity of his sin. No longer careless, he now longs for the peace and rest which alone are found in Christ.

How often we who are saved have been halted by some circumstance in life and made conscious of the fact that we have been drifting slowly away from the Lord. God uses that happening to stir us up and bring us back. Like a skilled helmsman, the Lord used it to bring our wandering vessel back to its proper course. Let us thank God for using such means to recover us.

Perhaps we should speak of God's use of circumstances in His dealings with men as His “abnormal” course. It seems clear from Scripture that He has special desire to use His Word to this end. He has given us His holy, inspired Word, and He delights to use it in blessing to both saint and sinner. In fact, where the Scriptures are unknown conversion to God is unknown also.

What power there was in a few words of Holy Writ as we felt its penetration into our hearts while still unsaved! How our souls were moved by those words: “Thou God seest me,” “Be sure you sin will find you out”, and “Ye must be born again”, while we tried to forget God and eternity! How often, since saved, we have heard His words: “Return unto Me”, “My sheep hear My voice”, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love”, etc! These came with living power to our souls, calling us back from wanderings of heart. God's Word has in itself a power altogether beyond the mere words used. It may have been while we read them, or when the Holy Spirit brought them back to memory. God may on occasions, use circumstances to confirm and corroborate His guidance through His Word (Acts 16:6-12). He delights to use His Word, both to the conviction and salvation of the lost, and to the correction and guidance of His people with or without any human instrument or intermediary.

In the majority of cases, God uses the preacher as is clearly seen in the conversion of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:29-35. The human voice, expressing the feelings of a human heart, is the vehicle mostly used of God. “How shall they hear without a preacher”? (Rom. 10:14) is a question that still lives. Our Lord called certain men of humble vocation to be with Him, and that they should later “preach the Gospel to every creature”.

In this age of advanced technology and modern communication, the Gospel can be sounded out to the ends of the earth. Sadly by the same means, people are hearing harmful unscriptural error. Nothing can compensate for the personal contact of the preacher with his audience and the commission of the risen Lord to His apostles “Go ye into all the world”, is valid unto the end of the age (Matt. 28:20; Mark 16:15). When God sends the message, He will send with it the sample as seen in the life of the messenger (see 1Thess. Ch 2). We must not relax and count that the unevangelized millions of this world will hear the Gospel by the media, thus excusing our lethargy. Nor will the time ever come when the spiritual need of believers will be met by any other means than by the heart to heart oral ministry of brethren with a burden and exercise from God to meet our spiritual need from the Word of God.

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## Questions and Answers

**Q**uestion: What is “The hope of salvation” (1Thess. 5:8)?

**A**nswer: Having dealt with the future of New Testament saints, both dead and living being caught up (caught away, raptured), “to meet the Lord in the air” (4:17) Paul now deals with times and seasons on earth after the rapture of the church. “The day of the Lord” (5:2) will be the final outpouring of Divine wrath during the period of Great Tribulation. To earth dwellers left behind after the rapture, this will come as a “thief”, with stealth, surreptitiously, slyly, suddenly, with unhappy surprise. It will mean “sudden destruction”; utter helplessness and ruin upon those who have rejected the Gospel in the day of Grace.

The believers of the church age, “are not in darkness” (5:4). We are not left to stumble and wander in ignorance of the purpose of God. All believers are “sons of light” (5:5) objectively we have illumination. We are awake and alert; we have the protective wear of “faith”, “love” and “hope” for the heart and head (no covering for the back), defence against surprise, sustains vigilance and courage. “Having put on”, once for all the “breastplate” and the “helmet”, this is not the hope of uncertainty but the reality beyond doubt of our “salvation” from the coming earthly day of wrath and tribulation soon to be revealed on earth. The breastplate is for the vital organs, of faith and love. The helmet is for the mind, the intelligence, the understanding of God’s purposes and programme in these successive intervals of “times”, and epoch making “seasons”.

The “hope of salvation” is the consummation of salvation from the coming day of judgement.

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**For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God ... (1Peter 3:18)**

**T**he first Epistle of Peter, authored by one of the near disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, was written primarily to exhort Christians who were suffering due to their acceptance of Christ; this is often the case. On a number of occasions, Peter sets before his readers the various sufferings that Christ endured, as an example to encourage them in their temporal trials, however grievous, and remind them of the glory soon to be theirs beyond this fading world. For Christ, His life on earth was one of obedience and suffering, resulting in rejection and death, but it led to resurrection, triumph and glory. This is also the path of those who enter into His victory of the cross, embracing the fullness of salvation that His sufferings achieved. Such suffering Peter himself endured, even to death (2Pet. 1:14,15).

### **For Christ ...**

The title Christ, is one of many applied to the Son of God and speaks somewhat of His regal glory as the future King of Righteousness, the anointed One who was in expectancy in Peter’s day being at the heart of so many prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures that were fulfilled at His first appearing.

He was often identified as Jesus of Nazareth, a despised place in His day growing up in a sphere of rejection. As a young child He was taken to Egypt away from troubled Herod’s murderous intents, but all in fulfilment of Scripture (Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:15,23). Later, around thirty years of age, His own people at Nazareth had sought to throw Him over the brow of a Hill, to ‘destroy’ Him but He simply passed through their midst on that occasion as the hour of His final rejection was not yet (Luke 4:29).



His sufferings included venomous verbal abuse, being branded as a deceiver, of being mad and possessed of demons as men resisted Him in their contradiction of themselves. It was written of Him many centuries earlier in light of the service that would be entrusted to Him by God the Father: ***“They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head”*** and again, ***“The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me”*** (Psalm 69:4,9). Yet He never deviated from the work He came to do.

As a Man, He was of king David’s line and thus heir to his throne, but those at Jerusalem from where He will reign in a future day as King of Kings, sought on more than one occasion to stone Him as they rejected His teaching of the truth and His exposure of their sin (John 8:59; 10:31). It was ultimately in this city via His enemy’s hands that His greatest sufferings were unquestionably experienced at the time of His death. It was then that He ***“endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself”*** (Hebrews 12:3) as men railed on him, spat on His face, setting Him at naught in their cruel mocking, denying ***“the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted”*** to them, to be released instead of Him, as they bayed for His death.

### **Also hath once suffered for sins**

Yet His sufferings reached their climax in His experience at the hands of a righteous God, altogether different from the sufferings at the hands of men, as He made Himself answerable for man’s sin. He willingly submitted to this suffering as written centuries earlier: ***“He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth”*** (Isaiah 53:7).

On the cross after three hours of impenetrable darkness He cried ***“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”*** (Mark 15:34). It was during this period of travail that His soul was made ***“an offering for sin”***, that God in ***“the day of His fierce anger”*** poured out His wrath upon Him and afflicted Him as if against sin itself.

### **The just for the unjust**

It is this contrast that Peter presses upon His readers, that as they were to bear patiently their unjust sufferings for doing good, how much more this was exemplified in Christ Himself. Never before or again, will such injustice be committed as was at Golgotha, or such restraint be shown in the face of such hatred when one word could have destroyed His adversaries. Never before or since has such love be expressed as when Christ died for His enemies. Never again will One, as Peter had testified to earlier in the epistle ***“Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth”*** (2:22), die in the interests of those who are full of sin. What a display of longsuffering is seen.

### **That He might bring us to God**

Yet if Christ had not shown such meekness and restraint, avenging Himself on those that sought to mistreat Him there and then, He would never have suffered on the cross, He would never have died for us, and God the Father would never have been able to offer us forgiveness. But His love for us far exceeded man’s hatred.

The ultimate victory of the cross opened the way for reconciliation between God and man. The apostle Paul wrote ***“We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him (Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”*** (2Corinthians 5:20,21). It is a matter of us being declared righteous before God when we in repentance and by faith accept Christ and His sacrifice for us, the unjust ones.

But Peter also poses a query in his epistle that if God uses suffering to judge (chastise) His believing children: ***“What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*** (1Pet. 4:17). The solemn answer lies in the historical destruction of the filthy cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah who ***“are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”*** (Jude 7).

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