

The Old Paths – July / September : 2017 – № 15

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For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

(1Peter 1:24,25)



From the Editor’s Desk

“Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30)

The Spirit told Philip to go down to the desert and join himself to the Ethiopian eunuch as he journeyed. He found him sitting in his chariot and reading the Scriptures. This prompted the above question which has vital importance to us today. Do we take time to read the Word of God? Do we understand what we are reading?

The Bible is the world’s greatest book. We may be interested in how we got the Bible, its human writers, its original languages, how it has been translated into our own language and how it has been preserved to us. We are so thankful if we live in a land where the Bible is freely available to us in our own language, but, do we read it? Godly men, in years gone by engaged in the devoted and dangerous work of translation to give us the Bible in our mother tongue. A distinguished Bible scholar has said; “There is yet one thing to do with the Bible, simply read it”.

The Ethiopian eunuch was a man of high position and great authority. He found time to make a long return journey from Africa to Jerusalem to obtain a copy of the Old Testament Scriptures. He considered the reading of the words of the prophet to be a priority and a necessity.

Older believers were once known as, “The men and women of the Book”. Is this still true of us? Do we read the Scriptures on a regular basis and feed upon them as our daily food? Too often our acquaintance with the Bible is casual and our reading is spasmodic. We turn to the Bible in circumstances of trial. We seek its verses when we need comfort. It is good to seek a solution when some problem arises in life. Our bodies are not properly nourished by occasional snacks. A diet of regular meals and healthy food is essential for the strength and stamina. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect (complete, mature), thoroughly furnished (completely fitted out, ready for use) unto all good works” (2Tim. 3:16-17).

We will not find time to read. We must set aside time from the pressure of studies, the demands of business and the long hours of work. The stress of family life, the call of social life, even the snare of pleasure too often means that the day dawns and the darkness falls without a quiet time set aside for systematic reading, quiet meditation and communion with the Lord.

On the dusty desert road, the eunuch learned about “Some other Man” Who was “Led as a sheep to the slaughter” (Acts 8:32-34). He also quickly learned about obeying the Word of God in baptism. “He commanded the chariot to stand still”. We are not surprised when we read that, “He went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:38-39).

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THE FLOOD (5)

In the last four articles we have looked at Noah, the Ark and the Flood from a *physical* and then from a *scriptural* standpoint. In these next few articles we will seek (D.V.) to bring out those *spiritual* lessons that we can learn as believers for our *present* day and generation.

The Character of Noah.

Noah stands out as *unique* among all his contemporaries and over many centuries of a long life. He was *righteous (just)* (Gen. 6:9 & Ezekiel 14:14,20), *perfect (upright in character)* (Gen. 6:9) and *obedient* (Gen. 6:22 & 7:5,9,16). He knew the intimacy of God’s presence – he walked with God (Gen. 6:9) and was regarded as one of the great examples of faith (Heb. 11:7). What a commendation! Are *all* these features, or indeed are *any* of these features, marking out our present lives in the world in which we live?

The Character of Noah’s “Day”.

When we think of the character of Noah, we need to remember that he didn’t live in a vacuum or in a monastery – he dwelt in the *midst* of a crooked and perverse generation, as we do (Phil. 2:15). Yet Noah stood out as different – do *we*? Yes, in many ways the society, the culture, the people and the circumstances were different from today, yet there was the over-riding single factor that unites *that* day with *today* – sin! Corruption, violence, wickedness and evil were widespread. Human depravity was everywhere exposed! The moral pressures must have been overwhelming and the temptations unending in a licentious and violent society.

Noah’s three sons had been born in “spiritually-dark days”, just like ourselves. How had they escaped corruption? Perhaps through the teaching and example of a godly father and possibly being busy in the work of the Lord (in their case, building the Ark). Noah also had to bear the continual rejection of the

masses to his preaching – not an easy thing to experience! Elijah had bemoaned of himself that “I, even I only, am left” (1Kings 19:10) – but he was wrong; there were 7,000 others! Noah *never* made any such complaint – if he had, it probably would have been correct!

The Faith of Noah.

We learn at least three things about Noah’s faith from Hebrews 11:1,7.

Firstly, **it was based on the Word of God** – he was “divinely warned”. Faith, to be properly placed, must *always* be based on what *God* says. Some people have faith in others, in themselves, in life generally, and some even think that if you believe hard enough, something will happen! But *real* faith can only be based on what *God* has said / revealed.

Secondly, **it was based on things as yet unseen**. The world often says – “I’ll believe it when I see it”, but believers’ faith is based on *reality*, even though not yet seen! Don’t forget that Noah had:

- *Never* experienced worldwide judgement,
- *Never* seen a worldwide flood – actually he had never seen rain,
- *Never* seen an example of the Ark that God told him to build, and
- *Never* seen animal migrations before.

To natural eyes and thinking these things were *incomprehensible*. Noah was told to commit decades of his life to prepare this Ark. Yet Noah *obeyed*!

Thirdly, **it was an active faith**. Noah moved with godly fear – he prepared the Ark. His faith moved him to action; there was tangible evidence. It was not merely *theoretical* and *academic*, it was real! Is ours?

The Obedience of Noah.

The voice of authority in our present day is continually being challenged and eroded, whether it be biblical, ecclesiastical, parental, governmental or judicial. If authority is challenged and not trusted, what is there to obey? Well, basically *nothing* – except our own individual dictates of a fallen nature. If we have no *absolute* standards, then we will be dictated to by *relative* standards, based on how the present generation regards certain matters! Noah’s obedience was wholehearted, continual and consistent.

The Righteous Character of Noah.

The Hebrew word for “righteous” in Genesis 7:1 is *singular*, perhaps suggesting that Noah *alone* was righteous in his generation. He certainly was not perfect – he was subject to failure like us all; his actions in Genesis 9:20-27, *after* the Flood, prove this! Yet God puts on *record* details concerning a man that was blameless and righteous in his conduct. The challenge to us today is quite penetrating. Do we conduct every aspect of *our* lives in an upright way? Do we stand-out and stand-up for that which is right, while others accept and drift along in any direction which is the order of the day? We do well to ask ourselves what is of prime importance to us – our *reputation* or our *character*? Our reputation is what men *think* of us and *perceive* us to be, while our character is what God *knows* us to be!! Like Job after him, what Noah was *before God* he was the same *before men*.

What’s Expected of Us?

When God *looked* upon the completed result of His creative acts, He expressed delight and satisfaction (Gen. 1:31) – *everything*, even to the most microscopic detail, brought joy to God’s heart. Yet sin entered in, and by the time you come to Genesis 6:12 (just over 1,500 years later) God *looked* down on the same Earth and saw *corruption*. Yet in the midst of that corruption there was a man on whom His grace was bestowed (Gen. 6:8), who was later declared as being righteous before God (Gen. 7:1). The scriptural order is significant here. It is recorded first that Noah “found grace” (Gen. 6:8), with the next verse (v.9) recalling his character before God and before men. So, we see an act of sovereign grace given, received through faith and then resulting in his godly and righteous walk.

Surely these principles remain with us today? God continues to *look-down* on a corrupt scene (2Chron. 16:9) and He *sees* the state of mankind *generally*, but also the condition of believers *individually* (Heb. 4:13). As with Noah, God gives us grace and strength to continue (2Cor. 12:9), if only we would avail ourselves of this supply.

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 5:1-11

Seriousness of sin within the assembly (v.1-2)

We have previously considered religious opposition to the Jerusalem assembly. While we recognise the effects of such persecution upon the persons concerned, the progress of the gospel was seldom harmed or hindered by it, often it strengthens resolve and witness. However, God's work will always be damaged severely by sin and division from within the fellowship. The section we are now considering shows how much God hates hypocrisy; how dangerous it is to offend our conscience when the Holy Spirit's power is evident; and how assembly discipline is necessary.

Sadly the names of Ananias and Sapphira will stand forever associated with the first record of sin in the assembly. We should note that God's judgment against sin in His people is always more extreme in the opening of new ways (dispensations) in His dealings with His people or following significant changes in circumstances, e.g. Nadab and Abihu, Achan, Uzzah, here and 1Corinthians 11:30. However believers in any age should remember that God cannot endure evil in His dwelling place anymore than He can in the world at large. Satan's attempt to frustrate God's new work of gospel grace through religious persecution had failed to date, so corruption was introduced. This is an attack from within the company of believers by people whose names mean "God is gracious" and "beautiful".

Ananias and Sapphira sought by premeditated and deliberate deceit to gain a good reputation while not suffering financially. They wanted the place of Barnabas (Acts 4:37), without having to pay the price. They were motivated not so much by relieving the poor, but to boost their own ego. There was no obligation on anyone to sell possessions and give the **full** amount towards the relief of the poor. But where a promise or contract was made to give all the monies realised, not to do so was robbing God. What was intended as spiritual pretension was really embezzlement. All robbery is wrong, but to rob God is even more serious: "Will a man rob God?" (Mal. 3:8). And care must always be taken in relation to giving more generally. Let us all be careful not to seek credit and prestige for sacrificial giving, "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:3,4).

The role of Sapphira is particularly tragic. A Christian wife is intended to be a helpmeet in a good sense, supporting her husband in the Lord's work. Sadly Sapphira had full knowledge of the deceit intended, "his wife also being privy to it", and connived equally with Ananias.

The death and burial of Ananias (v.3-6)

Evidently Ananias had not realised that Peter possessed a gift of discernment, "wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1Cor. 10:12). Peter speaks as the faithful spokesman for the fellowship when he said "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3).

Behind the deception, selfishness and hypocrisy of the guilty pair was the subtle activity of Satan, the inveterate adversary of God and His people. It was Satan's ploy to introduce untruthfulness and deceit into the assembly, thereby grieving the Holy Spirit and bringing believers under divine chastisement. We should

note that the Holy Spirit is a person who can be lied to and tempted (Acts 5:4,9); He is deity therefore to lie to Him is to lie to God; and He is holy and pure as per His name. For Ananias and Sapphira to benefit from their deception would discredit the source of Pentecostal power, hence the judgment that fell upon them.

Acts 5:4 makes it unmistakably clear that there would have been nothing wrong in Ananias and Sapphira withholding all or part of the sale money. Conversion does not abolish the right to have private property. Communal ownership was **not** compulsory and individual contributions were entirely **voluntary**. Hence they were not obliged to sell their field and give the money to the assembly: the choice was “in thine own power.” The crucial issue was regarding motive: outward action and inward motive had to be consistent. Peter concentrates on their hypocrisy, lack of honesty and integrity. It was to God the lie was told because it was to Him they inferred that the entire price was offered.

Peter exercises his apostolic authority as stated in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. It should be noted that “binding” and “loosing” in those verses refers to discipline on earth; it has absolutely nothing to do with forgiveness of sins or eternal salvation. Death and blessing in this chapter are similarly acts of the Holy Spirit in His governmental administration.

The sudden death of Ananias is an exceptional case of divine chastisement in the primacy of Pentecostal power and in the days of the Apostles. However, it is still a dangerous thing to profess to follow the Lord Jesus Christ unless one is willing to live honestly and walk uprightly! Ananias could not live longer in that atmosphere of love and holiness. The sentence meted out by God Himself was death. Often the first event or the first person in a new situation assumes a representative character. This is explained in 1Corinthians 11:30-32: “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [in death]. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

The immediate effect of this judgment was that “great fear came on all them that heard these things” (5:5). This is the solemnity that is experienced in the presence of a holy God. The assembly is a holy temple: it is not a mere religious association or a fraternity to advance social causes. If the power of true holiness was to be more in evidence among assemblies gathered to the Lord’s name today, then we might well expect to witness such chastening again. Certainly requests for baptism and reception to assembly fellowship would be made in a much more sober and thoughtful context.

The responsibility for the burial of Ananias was given to the younger men in the assembly. This is the **only** mention in the whole of the New Testament in relation to this age of grace of young men acting as a distinct group in the assembly. They would learn a solemn lesson from this experience.

The death and burial of Sapphira (v.7-10)

Sapphira knew nothing of Ananias’ death and funeral. Some three hours later she comes in to where Peter and others were gathered. In the resulting conversation Peter obtains the evidence that she was privy to the imposture. In asking the necessary questions Peter may have pointed to the money at his feet: “for so much?” Sapphira identifies herself with Ananias’ duplicity. It is a regrettable fact that the Lord’s people are not immune from the telling of blatant lies.

Peter then asks, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” There was a conspiracy between Ananias and Sapphira to see how far they could go. It was a wilful and blasphemous challenge to God’s holiness resulting from their mutual agreement to defraud. It is sad when a wife helps her husband to sin.

As Peter was speaking he heard the young men return from Ananias’ burial. Sapphira’s last memory is of hearing that her husband was both dead and buried, “Then fell she down straightway ... and yielded up the ghost.” United in their deception, Ananias and Sapphira are now united in death. And also they are united for ever in the enduring record of Scripture as a couple who, in conspiring to gain by deceit, lied to the Holy Ghost and paid the price for their presumptuous folly.

Again the young men have another burial to perform. They may well be fearful as to who might be next! If all young men grew up in assembly life with a healthy regard for the fear of the Lord, there would be a corresponding increase in spiritual reality, right thinking in conduct and greater personal righteousness.

The lasting effect of divine chastening (v.11)

These happenings were a warning to those within the assembly, as well as those without: "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." The cleansing effect of divine discipline cleared the way for further progress in gospel blessing and associated benefits, as we shall consider in the next paper, D.V.

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THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Paper 6 (ii) – PROGRESS

In these Papers we have considered the PRINCIPLES, PATTERN, PRACTISES and PRIVILEGE of local assembly fellowship. In the previous Issue, we traced the PROGRESS of the Gospel and formation of the assemblies in the Book of the Acts.

To develop further the need for PROGRESS the reader's attention is drawn to the lovely expression "They continued stedfastly" (Acts 2:42).

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

The work began when they, "Gladly received his word" (Acts 2:41).

The apostolic preaching of the Gospel followed the commission; "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). In the OT God said, "Preach unto it (Nineveh) the preaching that I bid them" (Jonah 3:2). The word "preach/preaching" occurs 74 times in the KJV. This is why we call the building, "The Gospel Hall". This tells the people what we do and where they can go if they have a desire to listen to the Gospel. Brethren and sisters in private should continue to spread the Gospel and influence relatives, friends and neighbours to come to hear what is being preached. There is a trend to neglect the preaching of the Gospel in the 'open air'. Paul went to Corinth, "To preach the Gospel" (1Cor. 1:17). What he preached was, "The preaching of the cross" (1Cor. 1:18). The preaching of Christ crucified is a message of reproach. To tell people about their sins is not popular. We do not preach a message which is popular to fallen sinful humanity yet this is our responsibility and if the work of the Lord is to progress, we must continue faithfully to preach the Word.

The exercise to preach the Gospel is the heart beat of the local assembly. We are good at starting but not continuing. The signs are tracts at the rear of the Hall covered in dust. Calendars not distributed by April. These indicate that someone had an exercise but did not continue. We visit a village once with the Gospel but give up because of the lack of response. A missionary once said that he had a favourite little song which he often sang to himself. It had one stanza, one verse, one line: "Go on, go on, go on ... go on, go on". "They continued stedfastly" (Acts 2:42). "Continuing daily..." (Acts 2:46).

THE PRACTICE OF BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

"Were baptized" (Acts 2:41).

The Mandate was given by the Lord, "Baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). The Method is shown in Acts 8:38, "They went down both into the water ... and he baptized him". To baptize is to, "whelm, immerse". The Meaning is given in Romans 6:4, "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". Thus baptism is not the ACT of a moment, but the FACT of a lifetime. Whither it has been 6 months or 60 years since we were baptized are we still walking in newness of life? Some make progress for a few years after salvation but then level off on a plateau of going to meetings but making very little progress.

THE PRINCIPLES OF SOUND DOCTRINE

"They continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine" (Acts 2:42).

Even the most humble brother or sister, young or old in the local assembly, should have a clear grasp of basic Bible doctrine. We should have a definite conviction of what we believe and why we believe it. It is essential to continue stedfastly to hold and practice foundational apostolic doctrine. To this end we should be able to hold a clear passage of Scripture on the essential doctrines such as the Deity of Christ (Heb. 1), the Humanity of Christ (Heb. 2), the Virgin Birth of Christ (Luke 1), the Inspiration of Scripture (2Tim. 3), the Trinity (1John 5), the Lordship and Headship of Christ (1Cor. 10-11), the local assembly (Matt. 18:20; 1Tim. 3:15). From the early chapters of Romans, we should be clear as to the basic doctrines of the Gospel: Ruin, Redemption, Propitiation, Atonement and Justification; Resurrection (1Cor. 15), Pre-Tribulation Rapture (1Thess. 4; Rev. 3:10) and the Literal Millennium Kingdom (Rev. 20).

Elders should be, "Apt to teach" (1Tim. 3:2). This does not mean that an elder must be an expositor or know Greek. It means that he should have a working knowledge of the above passages and other principles of sound doctrine so that he can plainly give a Scriptural reason for what we believe and practice.

THE PRIVILEGE OF FELLOWSHIP

"They continued steadfastly in the ... fellowship" (Acts 2:42).

This privilege has been dealt with at length in previous papers. The problem is that many assemblies do not continue to make progress. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1). Sardis was once a vibrant assembly but was marked by deterioration, decay, departure and apart from a small remnant it was, "dead". It was formal; it had become an organisation, it had a denominational "name". In the church a Sardis, saints had become motionless, the messages were powerless, they had services marked by deadness. The worship was like a wax museum, marked by sameness. The meetings were as cold as a graveyard, there was no power. The elders had hibernated, there was clerical ritual. There would have been cobwebs in the baptistery tank and the sisters would be bored listening to the same prayers week after week. The preacher may have eloquent diction as he gives his dead lecture. The listener may have his eyes closed, wither praying or sleeping but has not said "Amen" for some months.

The Lord said that Sardis was, "dead"; a congregation of corpses, their exercise was embalmed, their meetings were a morgue, the believers come and go as church goers. If we put the truth in a coffin and the Gospel in a casket, the assembly will not progress. Men do doctrinal "U-Turns", the believers give up and in one generation the lampstand can become a monument of the past. Brethren, "Be watchful" (wakeful, wake up) from complacency and compromise. (Rev. 3:2), "And strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die".

THE PARTAKING OF THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

"They continued stedfastly in ... the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42).

In the OT the people of God were limited to an annual feast on the day of Atonement when the nation was represented by one man who entered before the Lord. The unique special privilege of the day of Grace is the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The Lord's Supper as instituted by the Lord Himself is the nearest to heaven we shall get on this earth (Luke 22:19). Obedience to the Lord's request is the mark of a godly NT assembly exercising priesthood and distinct from Christendom. Pastoral supervision, individual cups and cubes of bread are the modern innovations which mar the simple Scriptural pattern (1Cor. 10:16-17; 1Cor. 11:20-30). This is the highest privilege preserved to us to "continue" as the Lord commenced with the eleven in the upper room to, "shew the Lord's death till He come" (1Cor. 11:26).

PRAYERS

“They continued stedfastly ... in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The first direct communication from heaven after 400 years, as recorded in Luke’s Gospel is, “Thy prayer is heard” (Luke 1:13). This was the message to the house of the praying couple. We are to pray always. We value praying men and praying women. When we reach heaven we will no longer be able to pray in a scene of need. The corporate prayers of the assembly are a feature of the Book of Acts. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together” (Acts 4:31). “Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5). Paul writes: “I will therefore that men (males) pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1Tim. 2:8).

Among our prayers we should pray earnestly and fervently that in our individual lives and assembly testimony we be strengthened by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures to make progress. How blessed, if it should be that we are the generation on earth when the Lord comes, that it could be said as at the beginning, “They continued stedfastly”.

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ANOINTING from the Holy One

We have considered in the issue No. 12 from the Old Testament how places, persons and properties (instruments in the tabernacle) were anointed. They were sanctified and completely separated as Holy unto God. They were above common men and materials. Prophets proclaimed God’s message to men, priests offered sacrifices for men to God and King’s ruled the nation. Their ministries were ending by means of death. Places like Bethel, Ramah Shiloh, Jerusalem etc. had prominence as sacred cities. But in the New Testament nowhere we come across a place being DEDICATED nor any person pouring oil on any man in continuation of the Old Testament rituals. The Lord Jesus Christ was anointed in the gospels physically by women twice on His head (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3) and twice on His feet (Luke 7:38; Jn. 12:3). The Lord said, that it was for His burial and NOT for holding any post in the Jewish religious system. The good Samaritan poured oil on the victim at the road to Jericho (Luke 10:34). Yes, it is instructed in the book of James to anoint oil on sick person and to pray by the elders (James 5:14). Before going into further we should know how this anointing oil was prepared, what all prohibitions were required and what all prophecies were intended.

1. PREPARATION OF THE ANOINTING OIL:- (Exod. 30:22-25)

“Moreover the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take thee also unto thee principal spices, of pure **MYRRH** five hundred shekels, and of sweet **CINNAMON** half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet **CALAMUS** two hundred and fifty shekels, And of **CASSIA** five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil **OLIVE** an hin: And thou shall make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.”

All the five ingredients in the anointing oil speak about the unique person and perfect work of Christ. There is none like the Lord Jesus Christ – He is unique and the fragrance of the anointing oil speaks of His fragrance in life. Oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit.

2. PROHIBITIONS:- (Exod. 30:32,33; Lev. 10:7)

God strictly prohibited the Israelites NOT to make ointment of the same kind with the same ingredients. This was not to be applied on human flesh. Those with anointing oil on them were not allowed to touch dead bodies. After the death of Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire the Lord strictly prohibited from touching those dead bodies. “And ye shall NOT go out from the door of tabernacle of the congregation, lest

ye die: FOR THE ANOINTING OIL OF THE LORD IS UPON YOU". And they were not to drink wine nor strong drink while going into the tabernacle of the congregation.

The anointing oil was to remain unique for cleansing, for consecration and for coronation. Anointing was to be done on the head only. By these observances particular person or place was set apart completely for specific service or post ordained by God among His people Israel.

3. **PROPHECY**:- (Isa. 61:1-3; Ps. 45:8; Dan. 9:26)

All the prophecies in O.T. regarding anointing are centred around the coming Messiah. The Lord Jesus Christ claimed these prophecies being fulfilled by His coming in human body (Luke 4:18). He was anointed for service and sacrifice. He proved it through His public ministry as he gave eyesight to born blind and raised the dead even from the grave. God was well pleased at His private life (Matt. 3:17) and about His public life at the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:5 and Mark 9:7). His sacrificial death on the cross was sweet savour to God. With His own blood He entered into the presence of Holy God (Heb. 9:14). All these were written in the law of Moses, Psalms and the prophets pointing at a person – Jesus of Nazareth. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes in Ch. 1:9, "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath ANOINTED thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

"Is this the Man can this be He
The prophets have foretold,
Should with transgressors numbered be
And for my crimes be sold?"

(To be continued)

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the
spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of
counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of
the fear of the LORD; ...
(Isaiah 11:2)

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MISINTERPRETED TEXTS

1Corinthians 13:10 – "When that which is perfect is come"

Some teach that this refers to heaven. If so, then should the verse not read; "When we have come to perfection?" This is not the context.

Others believe that it refers to gifts. It is to be observed that the text is not comparing the temporal with the eternal, but it is contrasting the incomplete with the complete. There is no need for the apostle to tell us that sign gifts shall cease when we get to heaven.

The verse refers to the completed canon of Scripture. When Paul wrote these words, there were at most three New Testament books available to the Corinthian believers. Only 1 and 2 Thessalonians and possibly James had been written earlier.

The apostle is considering charity (love) with the sign gifts. Love will never fail or fall into disuse, but prophecies will be nullified or rendered inoperative ("katargeo"); tongues will cease ("pauo"); knowledge – that is of the intuitive order – will be nullified ("katargeo"), "For we know in part, ... but" – and then follow

the words we are considering. “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (abolished, annulled, cease beyond recall).

The sign gifts served their purpose but now we have the complete Bible they fall down as petals fall off a flower or they fall out as soldiers from a march. A torch is useful at night but it is superfluous when the sun is shining.

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Get to Know Your Bible

THE COURSE OF THE AGES

(Romans 12:1-2; 1Cor. 10:11; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:19-21; Col. 1:25-26)

There are 2 Greek words for “world” in the New Testament – *aion* which means an age or period of time and *cosmos* meaning earth or world system. In these verses the correct word is age (*aion*) and these ages portray the prophetic programme of God. About 75% of the Bible is prophecy – foretelling not forth telling. A large portion of this prophecy has already been fulfilled – in relation to the nation of Israel and the first advent of the Lord. Prophecy is not solely given to fill our minds with knowledge but it should have a practical effect on our lives day by day as well.

God is eternal; God the Father (Deut. 33:27), God the Son (John 1:1), God the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14). God belongs to eternity and certain things were done before time began – for example believers chosen (Eph. 1:4), glory ordained for those who believe (1Cor. 2:7), eternal life promised (Titus 1:2), Lamb foreordained (1Peter 1:19-20). Time began with creation and when we think of this we should bow in wonder and adoration as we think of the grandeur, glory and majesty of God revealed in creation.

Three characteristics of God are manifested in Creation – light, life and love. When we think of light (Days 1-4) we can see that one of the oldest truths of Scripture is the truth of separation as light involves separation – day from night, light from darkness. When we think of life (Days 5 and 6 – the living creatures) we see fruitfulness – this should always follow life. When we think of love (Day 6), we have communion. With the creation of man and woman the work was complete and so God rested.

The prophetic programme in the Word of God shows that God is moving steadily on towards the end He has in mind for the universe according to His own Sovereignty. This programme is divided into ages of time and the ways of God with men are characterised by dispensations. An age is different to a dispensation – an age is a specific period of time whilst the word dispensation means an administration, what God is doing during that particular period of time. There are *passages* where truth concerning the truth was not revealed – these past ages are for our learning so we can learn lessons from them. Then there is this *present* age which according to Galatians 1 is an evil one and we are not to be conformed to it. Evil has been around since the Fall but this present age is particularly evil because of the rejection of the Just One and because Satan is the god of this age. Then there is the *age to come* – the Millennium age.

There are seven great events in the dealing of God with man that mark out the seven ages of time (See Table).

The 5 ages which are past were ages of testing; 5 is the number of man’s responsibility and man’s failure in this testing shows man’s ruin because of the fall. They are also ages of types and shadows all pointing forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth.

(1) The Age of Innocence – the Test of Commitment

Dominion was given to Adam (Psalm 8). God created Adam without the use of either man or woman (Creation), He formed Eve by the use of man and not woman (Formation), mankind reproduces through Generation (man and woman) and the Lord came into this world through Incarnation – the use of the woman without the man. In Genesis 5:2 we read that He called their name Adam – maybe from this verse we have the fact that the woman takes the man's name in marriage. Headship was divinely given to the man in creation and subjection to the woman. It is not superiority and inferiority. There are two distinct spheres – headship which involves administration and direction and subjection which involves the emotions.

No	Age	Feature of the Age	The Close of the Age
1	Innocence	Here we see God asserting His Sovereign right over the earth and Adam is His vice-regent	Man cast out of the garden
2	Conscience	God is calling out a people to be strangers and pilgrims	The judgement of the flood
3	Human Government	God is again asserting His claim over the earth and gives government to Noah	The call of Abraham
4	Covenant Promise	God is again calling out a people for Himself to be passing through as strangers	Giving of the law on Sinai
5	Law	Again God is asserting His claim to the earth	First advent of the Lord
6	Present	In the dispensation of grace God is again calling out a people for Himself to be strangers and pilgrims	Second advent of the Lord (The Manifestation)
7	Millennium (Kingdom Rule)	God is again asserting His Sovereign right over the earth	Judgement at the end of the 1000yrs (Rev. 20). Brings to an end the ages of time with new heavens and a new earth

Man and woman are equal in God's sight but with different spheres. Headship was divinely given to the man but headship was satanically engineered for the woman (1Tim. 2). The prince of this world was involved in the fall. Adam fell in a three-fold way;

Spiritually – No more communion with God, sin caused havoc, and separation from God was the result (dead to God).

Morally – He had the knowledge of evil but he did not have the power to withstand it. Sin has been passed to us all and we prove it by our acts. We are not sinners because we sin but we sin because we are sinners.

Physically – Physical death came in for the first time, all because of failure in the test of contentment. We too need to be wary lest we fail in this – “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1Tim. 6:6).

The problem is that prosperity brings materialism and discontentment often follows.

(2) The Age of Conscience – the Test of Conduct

God now begins to deal with man in the light of conscience and conduct. There is no further communication from God during this age. Through Adam they knew that the only way of approach to God was through the shedding of blood and sacrifice. God taught them that “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” and they took this knowledge with them out of the garden. Men were now left to their own conscience – con (with) science (knowledge). Knowledge that you and I have along with God – man has a conscience and knows what is right and wrong. However, instead of seeking God men went their own way and rebelled and did not act according to their conscience. The verses in Romans 1 refer to this age – three times over we are told “God gave them up”. This age is also referred to in 2Peter 3:6 “the world that then

was". They had a full knowledge of God – Adam lived during this period for 930 years out of the approximately 1650 years of the age. Enoch walked with God and was translated 57 years after Adam's death. For the last 240 years of Adam's life Methuselah was living, and so the people were without excuse. They had a full knowledge of God and turned away from Him. Satan used Cain and his posterity to build a world system lying in the lap of the wicked one (1John 5:19). There was failure in the test of conduct and conscience and this failure brought in the Flood. We too should be aware of the need for a "good conscience" (1Tim. 1:5) referring to our manner of life.

(3) The Age of Human Government – the Test of Conformity

Government was given to Noah to control the corruption and evil that was so evident at the end of the Age of Conscience. Government is given to men to rule over men – we see this in Romans 13:1. Men are no longer equal in rank but they are equal in responsibility. In the Flood there had been a manifestation of the character of God in the judgement of evil. Those after the Flood had no excuse for not knowing the character of God. Shem lived 100 years before the Flood and then lived 500 years after it for the whole of the age of human government. He died 75 years after Abraham was called. There was no excuse for mankind as they had in their midst those who had witnessed the judgement of God and who had enjoyed His provision in salvation. Likewise men and women in this present age have no excuse.

Sadly rebellion against God marked this age. The leader of this rebellion was Nimrod whose name means "the rebel" – he was a "mighty hunter before the Lord" which means "in defiance of the Lord". He was a hunter of men in defiance of the Lord. Here with the Tower of Babel we have the commencement of Babylon. Just as God has a centre so Satan too has a centre. When it came to Babel, men were ignorant of God and His power. They built a tower to "answer to God in the heavens" (not to reach heaven but to answer to the heavens – idolatry and the Zodiac). The tower was the spiritual side but they also built a city which was the commercial side and they gave themselves a name, which was the political side. We see these three again in Revelation – in chapter 13 we have the commercial side, the spiritual side in chapter 17 and the political side in the Beast. So we see failure in conformity and responsibility. We need to ensure that we don't fail in conformity to the Word of God in all aspects of our lives.

(4) The Age of Covenant Promise – the Test of Commitment

God now commences to build a nation for Himself – the nation of Israel. This is the period of the patriarchs who were to be strangers and pilgrims (Heb. 11). We too are strangers and pilgrims passing through this scene on our way home, though we sometimes put our roots down far too deep. We are not of this world so we should be different from it and have different ambitions.

- In Abraham we see a life of Faith – "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Cor. 5:7)
- In Isaac we have a life of Sonship – "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). The leading of the Spirit is not merely in relation to the Lord's Day morning but it is to do with the whole life of the child of God. We should always be under the control of the Spirit of God.
- In Jacob we see a life of conflict – "for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit" (Gal. 5:17). We have a problem with the flesh – not the old man as that has been crucified with Christ – and we should be careful that we do not pander to the flesh but rather listen to the Spirit.
- In Joseph we see a life of godliness – "exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (1Tim. 4:7).

Abraham was a man of faith, Isaac a man of love (the first mention of love is in Genesis 22 to do with Isaac). Jacob a man of hope (he served in hope for Rachel) and Joseph a man of faith (in his father's house), hope (in the pit and the prison) and love (in the palace).

Sadly the nation became settled and comfortable in Egypt and they were no longer marked by pilgrimage. God had to change the monarch, and bondage and slavery came, so that they might long to be out of Egypt. So we see failure in the test of commitment. We must be careful that we do not become too settled into this world and lose our pilgrim character. God might have to put his hand upon us so that we too might long to be back where we once were.

(5) The Age of Law – the Test of Subjection

The nation was now delivered out of Egypt in order to be brought in to the Promised Land. They were redeemed by blood and by power. 1Cor. 6:19,20 shows us that we too have been bought with a price, we are not our own.

Exodus 12 – “Ye are brought with a price” (salvation)

Exodus 13 – “Ye are not your own” (sanctification)

Exodus 14 – “Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit” (separation)

- In Exodus chapters 19-24, there is one communication from God when the law is given. This is linked with God’s Throne and He is showing them the need for justification (Romans).
- In chapters 25-31, there is a manifestation of God’s holiness linked with His house and He is showing them the need for sanctification (Ephesians).
- In the book of Joshua we see failure to possess their possessions – we must ensure that we are enjoying the spiritual wealth that is our (Eph. 1:3).
- In Judges we see features of self-will and an abandonment of the Truth of God. We must be careful that we do not set aside certain parts of God’s Word just because we want to do things that please ourselves. God has given us His Word to guide and direct us, as well as to feed us.
- In 1Samuel we see a forsaking of God as King in order to be like others. This ended in the eventual captivity of a divided kingdom that will remain divided until the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 14; Jer. 15; Ezek. 37).

The age ends with Judah being brought out from Babylon back into the land, and they were in the land at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. So we see failure in the test of subjection. This brings us to the end of the ages of testing.

(6) This Present Age

The whole course of this is unfolded in Matthew 13. The age is divided into 2 dispensations:

Grace – The acceptable year of the Lord where God is building for Himself a heavenly people.

Wrath – The day of vengeance of our God, which is to do with an earthly people.

The present age is evil in character – Galatians 1:4 – and we are not to be conformed to it (Rom. 12:1-2) but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We need to realise that this age, will end with the eventual destruction of the man of sin. Therefore we need to demonstrate true pilgrim character as we pass through.

(7) The Millennium Age

This is when Satan will be bound for 1000 years. It will be a reign of righteousness and peace. Then at the end Satan is loosed and we have the final rebellion of man ending in the dissolution of the earth (2Peter 3:10) and the Great White Throne (Rev. 20), followed by the new heavens and the new earth (2Peter 3:13).

(Concluded)

OUR DEAR BROTHER PHIL HARDING WAS CALLED HOME TO BE WITH THE LORD ON 3rd MAY 2017. We deeply appreciated our brother’s articles as printed in this magazine. We trust that, while his oral teaching is now over, his written ministry will continue to be used by God to the blessing of His people. Please continue to pray for his widow Gwen who is quite frail and his three daughters.

“PAUL’S METAPHORS”

(8) ACCOUNTANCY : THE PROFIT OR LOSS

Paul was in business for Christ. He was trading for eternity in the currency of heaven. “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7).

Paul wrote about Abraham. “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him (reckoned unto his account) for (as, held to be) righteousness” (Gal. 3:6). Righteousness was credited to Abraham in the Divine ledger. Moses calculated profit and loss; “Esteeming (accounting) the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect (was looking) unto the recompence of the reward” (Heb. 11:26).

Today the financial world revolves around stock market prices. Nations suffer austerity because of currency levels, inflation and banking losses. Corruption leads to a change in bank notes. The value of investments, interest rates and valuations fluctuate daily.

Amid the incessant media focus on the “rich lister’s” and the continual bombardment of “get rich quick” strategies, the believer’s attention could easily be diverted away from the inestimable wealth that is ours in our Lord Jesus Christ. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though **He was rich**, yet for your sakes He became poor, **that ye** through His poverty **might be rich**” (2Cor. 8:9). “In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to **the riches of His grace**” (Eph. 1:7). “That in the ages to come He might shew **the exceeding riches of His grace** in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7). “...God, Who is **rich in mercy**,...” (Eph. 2:4). “O the depth of the **riches** both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33). “In Whom are hid **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**” (Col. 2:3). “For in Him dwelleth **all the fulness** of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). “And **ye are complete in Him**” (Col. 2:10). “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the **unsearchable riches of Christ**” (Eph. 3:8). “That He would grant you, according to **the riches of His glory**, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16).

Paul wrote “what things were gain to me” (Phil. 3:7). We may ask, “What things?” In the previous verses he lists the “things” he formerly considered as of great merit and morality. He had been before conversion a practising Jewish fundamentalist, fanatical in his beliefs, fastidious in his practices. He had purity of parentage, family nobility and ceremonial morality. His outward conduct religiously was irreproachable (Phil. 3:4-6). He puts these “things” into the profit and loss columns of his new spiritual ledger. His assets changed to liabilities, pluses became minuses and gains were really damages compared to what he now had in Christ. “Those I counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7).

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but (to be) loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win (gain) Christ” (Phil. 3:8). This is his account after thirty years of faithful service. The former things he put in the loss column. He cast them away as refuse, unworthy to be counted. They were as excrement of animals, refuse of crops, droppings from the table or wiping’s of the hands. In the profit column his gain was Christ. The blank side of the balance sheet was filled as being conformed unto His death and the quickening power of the risen Christ in his life.

In 2Timothy we read Paul’s last recorded words. He has no home, no wealth, no possessions and little clothes. He is in prison at Rome; probably a dismal cold underground cell, with a hole in the roof for air, soon to be executed as a criminal. His service is over and he will soon be handing in the account. His is not defeated or disappointed. He has put his deposit in the bank of Glory, he has handled the currency of

Heaven, his treasures are above. He says, "I know (Him) whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep (guard the deposit) that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2Tim. 1:12). Paul is speaking of all that he has as a believer in salvation and service. The account has increased in value, the proceeds are in safe keeping and he is sure of a good interest rate.

Stewardship is like a deposit account, against the future day of reward. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will make manifest what may be obscure at present. "Gold, silver, precious stones" (1Cor. 3:12), are valuable, costly, durable, non combustible, and cannot be manufactured. "Wood, hay, stubble" are common, perishable, products of nature. The plus or minus columns differ in cost, character and combustibility. As a bad workman suffers loss of wages, or a poor accountant makes a loss in business so the true assessment will be made in the "Day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor. 1:8).

"They that will (are determined to be, plan to be) rich, fall into temptation and a snare" (1Tim. 6:9). Gold is not gain or godliness. Godly men, such as Abraham and David were rich. Poor men can sin by desiring to be rich. Determination at any price to gain wealth can lead to corruption. The believer can be overwhelmed in pursuit of earthly gains in this present life with a destructive effect upon spiritual gain. "Charge them that are rich in this world (the present age), that they be not highminded, nor trust (have hope) in uncertain riches" (1Tim. 6:17). They should not put confidence in precarious possessions even though obtained in an entirely proper way. To Timothy, Paul writes; "I give thee charge in the sight of God ... That thou keep this commandment". Timothy was given the doctrines and teachings of this Epistle, to keep as a trustee, to preserve the truths of scripture as a priceless treasure, "Until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Tim. 6:13-14).

At the end of his life Paul summarised the account. "For I am now ready to be offered (priestly), and the time of my departure (nautical, ship sailing away) is at hand. I have fought a good fight (wrestler), I have finished my course, (runner) I have kept the faith (military, as a guard)". Paul has kept "the faith", objectively, the deposit, the truth he had kept safe, he has been loyal to his trust. "Henceforth there is laid up (as a deposit) for me a crown of righteousness". Paul had no doubt about how his account would look when the books were evaluated. Stored away for him at the Judgment Seat was a profitable, just reward for faithful stewardship. His earthly life was soon to end in the unjust court of Caesar. What loss he had suffered in this life would prove to be eternal gain from the Righteous Judge, "at that day" (2Tim. 4:6-8).

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The Servant of God

"Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD" (Haggai 1:13)

This scripture text prescribes what it means to speak out the Lord's message. This requires earnest preparation for both the man and the message. The *character* of the speaker, as well as the *content* and the *communication* of the message are all-important and must be motivated by God.

The message of God, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been committed to the preacher. It is the oracle of God Himself. The messenger, therefore, may make or mar that message (1Pet. 4:11). "The preacher is the golden pipe through which the divine oil flows. The pipeline must not only be golden, but open and flawless, that the oil may have a full, unhindered, undiluted flow. The glory and efficiency of the gospel is stacked on the men who proclaim it" – E.M. Bounds.

We summarise as to what a messenger of the gospel should be:

Must be a Man Called of God

Without the call of God and having His commission to “go” no one can serve God. First of all, God is absolutely sovereign in the choice of workers. We cannot raise up labourers. It is to our peril that we seek to multiply workers by way of human methods. We must be completely cast upon Him and rely on Him for this. Only the one who is commissioned and approved of God can serve Him acceptably, and only then will that ministry be approved.

To serve God one must receive a definite call from Him – a call to special service. Every born-again Christian is called “through His grace” (Gal. 1:15) and “called unto the fellowship of His Son” (1Cor. 1:9). This is a *call to salvation*. He is also called to *Christian living*. We are called of God to peace (1Cor. 7:15), hope (Eph. 4:4), glory (1Thess. 2:12), liberty (Gal. 5:13) and to suffer for His Name’s sake (1Pet. 2:20-21). However, *a call to serve* is different and definite. Paul was “called an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1). Before Barnabas and Paul went out on their first missionary journey, God told the church at Antioch that He had called them for this specific work (Acts 13:2). *The call of God to an individual is the only basis on which he can serve God.*

Must be a Man Commended by the Local Church

God’s call to an individual is as much related to the church as to the individual. The gifts of evangelists and pastors/teachers are given by God for the building up of the church and for the edification of its members (Eph. 4:10-13). A ‘God-called man’ must be one who is recognized by the church of which he is a member. Peter and John were sent to Samaria when God set His Name there (Acts 8:14). Barnabas was sent to Antioch when the Lord blessed the labours of His servants (Acts 11:22). The local church in which they were ministering commended Saul and Barnabas when they had a special call to go out for the new work (Acts 13:1-4). Thus, we find that the New Testament principle is that *the local church must commend and send out a called individual to the field.*

The so-called commendation letter however, is now being used for every purpose other than what it was intended for, in the Scripture. The commendation is wrongly considered to be a “Certificate”, “Licence” or “A Title Deed” for a missionary or a full-time servant and is being used only to get the approval of the Missionary or Service Organisations who administer funds. But this is clearly not the scriptural meaning. It is merely the recognition by the local assembly of which the individual is a member and of his special call to which God has called him. Sadly, it is being used like a passport. The togetherness, love and fellowship, between the commending assembly, the individual commended and the service rendered by him in the field are never considered at all.

In the addition to the call of God, he must also be an approved person, not only of the people of God with whom he is in fellowship with, but also, by the outside world. He must be a “man of *honest report*” (Acts 6:3). When the young man Timothy joined the company of Paul in his missionary endeavours, we find him to be “*well reported*” of, by the brethren both at Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). Commended by his own church and well spoken of and having good report are two prerequisites for an individual to serve God.

Must be a Man with a Character of Godliness

Without godliness dwelling deep down in us, we cannot be messengers of the gospel. It is a vocation of character. A school-teacher, a mechanic and a traffic controller can be immoral, covetous and intemperate, but yet they can be skilful workers in their respective jobs. But it cannot be so with the gospel preacher. If one acts hypocritically he will not be able to discharge his responsibilities as a good servant of God. Without the qualifications outlined in 1Timothy 3, one cannot serve God.

The one and only priority of the servant must be his love for his Lord and Master. He should be a man prepared in the closet, with a vision of lost and perishing souls, compelled by divine love. His passion should be, “Lord, give me a love for souls.”

Must be a Man with God-given Gifts

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever” (1Pet. 4:11).

The servant must be aware of the gifts which the Lord has given him. He must also know his limitations.

Today’s Christendom considers a “God-given gift”, as some special ability to sing, preach, organize, administer, control, lead, etc. However, this is not what the Bible speaks about. It is the *spiritual gift*, the Spirit’s enablement to win souls, teach and spiritually build God’s people, to shepherd and develop them constructively as members of the church, and also to encourage them to suffer for the sake of the Lord and the truth.

Along with this spiritual gift, he must also possess the *grace of God* to utilize the God-given gifts. He is to serve humbly and without self-exalting and self-seeking. This requires God’s grace. His one desire should be “that God in all things, may be glorified through Jesus Christ”. As apostle Paul instructed his son in faith, “Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee” (2Tim. 1:6); so one has to stir up and develop the gift that the Lord has bestowed through the Holy Spirit and with the grace of God.

Must Evaluate his Own Self

We should improve and sanctify our gifts for God (Rom. 12:3). We have to think orderly, speak thoughtfully, communicate clearly and feel deeply. Peter and John were fishermen; Amos was a shepherd; Matthew was a tax collector, while Paul was a university doctor. Yet we find their writings a *self-effacing*, *Christ-exalting*, *God-glorifying* and *audience-edifying* ministry. We should work hard to attain the proficiency.

The preacher is only a *channel*, not the source of the message. We have been commissioned only to *preach*, to be His *witness* and to *serve* Him. In ourselves we are nothing. Because of the honour of being entrusted with the gospel, the preacher’s personal life must be *clean*, and *holy*, “meet for the Master’s use” (2Tim. 2:21). The preacher and the teacher require discipline of heart, mind, body and soul (see 2Tim. 2:3-12).

“The preachers sharpest and strongest preaching should be to himself. His most difficult, delicate, laborious and thorough work must be with himself.” - E.M. Bounds

We are only stewards of God, not owners. As stewards holding the message given by God we are accountable. As ministers of Christ, we stand as stewards of the mysteries of God (1Cor. 4:1), and to the sound doctrine of God, and thus, we ought to be clear in our teaching and sound in our doctrine. We are also stewards of the manifold grace of God (1Pet. 4:10). As faithful stewards we should never lose sight of our accountability. We should always be alert to this fact. As we pass through different situations and circumstances in our life and service, as we face different issues, we have to be watchful not to barter our stewardship, that is, we should not exchange our stewardship for something else

Must be Sensitive to the Holy Spirit

Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit is the ultimate requirement for effective preaching. He is the Author of the Word, the Enabler of effectiveness, the Producer of repentance and faith and the Indweller of every believer. He burdens the preacher and He stirs His love within his heart, guides him as he studies and selects his text. He empowers preaching and He alone can give real conviction and eternal results in salvation.

The preparation for the message is totally dependent upon God the Holy Spirit. The messenger has to be fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. There can be fluency of words *without life*, there can be form *without power*, and there can be facts *without feeling*. The true soul-winner should fear these negatives, as he has to face the sinners who could be either in heaven or hell for all eternity. We are humbled in the Lord’s presence when we see fields ploughed but no fruit, the net cast in the sea but no catch; sermons preached, admired and praised but no soul-saving. We need a revival in the closet – Holy Spirit preparation in the secret.

We may not have failed in the presentation but in preparation. We need a deep exercise of our *hearts* and should cry out, “Lord, give us that love for souls in the secret place”.

Isaiah saw the Lord in His holiness, then himself in his sinfulness before he was sent to preach to others in their hopelessness (Isaiah Ch. 6).

Must have the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

In Romans 8:14 we read, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”. When you go to your work or as you go out visiting, do you expect to be guided by the Spirit or God? Very many Christian servants have testified as to His wonderful leading they enjoy day by day. An evangelist on day was greatly impressed with the thought that he should go and visit a man he had often prayed for, but had not seen for years. At some cost he went out to the convalescent home and met his friend. That man had been praying to God to send a preacher. In answer to his prayer, the Spirit of God had guided the evangelist to go visit him. That day he led his friend to Christ. That same evening the sick man swooned, and later died without regaining consciousness. Now consider, if the evangelist had not been sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and been out of touch with God, the man might have died in his sins. If we are anxious to be led of the Spirit, we must not consciously *grieve* Him (Eph. 4:30). Any unconfessed sin grieves the Spirit and hinders the effectiveness of our service to Him.

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Separate from Sinners

Hebrews 7:26

We are living in a day of compromise, when evil is tolerated in most spheres. We see the foreshadowing of awful events to come, as even God’s children, under the cry of Christian unity, are turning away from the steadfast faith of the Scriptures. This is most noticeable in regard to the truth of separation. In God’s reckoning, we were separated from the world the moment we accepted Christ as Saviour; in His will, we should be making our separation evident by our godly manner of life among men.

SEPARATION

Separation, as taught in Scriptures, is neither segregation nor isolation. The separated believer does not think of himself as being superior to others, nor does he isolate himself from other men to achieve the separation God desires. This is best understood by considering the perfect life of the Lord Jesus when here upon earth. While men sneered, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:2), the Spirit of God declares that He was “Separate from sinners”. Both statements are true yet not incompatible. Entirely separated from the evil of man’s conduct, He was intensely interested in man’s deliverance, hence the sinner had access to God’s beloved Son, Who nevertheless remained untainted by sin.

Physical separation from ungodly men would require our going out of the world (1Cor. 5:10) but to be spiritually separated, while constantly in contact with them, should be our aim at all times. Appreciation of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ will enable us to see the world in its true perspective and to give it the crucified place of Galatians 6:14. Entering into the true meaning of this verse, we also accept the crucified place as far as the world is concerned. Those exercised as to such truth have no part in loving the world, being separated from it, though living in it.

This exercise will teach us to deny “Ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to “Live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12). It will save from the accursed materialism of this present time

which is ruining the lives of so many dear children of God. It will deliver from the false movement of so-called Christian unity where the word of God is set aside and the Lordship of Christ denied. It will teach us to stand apart from the world's pleasures like Moses (Heb. 11:25), from its politics like Paul (Phil. 3:20) and, above all, from its religion, where the Gospel is either denied or adulterated and the truth of God for His saints altogether neglected.

AMALGAMATION

At the present time, amalgamation is the key word commercially, politically and religiously. As saints of God, let us beware of this deadly evil. Unity among God's people is ever desirable so long as it is the unity of Psalm 133:1, expressed in New Testament language as "The unity of the Spirit" which leads to and is linked with "The unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:3,13). While we should strive to be united with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, we must remember the test of this love is that preparedness to do all that our Lord has commanded – "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Beyond all other considerations is that true-hearted love for God and His truth which will unite His people as nothing else can.

Such a condition therefore necessitates that we stand apart or "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2Cor. 6:17) as to everything that is not of God. Whether the composition of a company be wholly of unbelievers, or part believers and part unbelievers, or altogether of believers (unless such bow to the revealed will of God), separation must be practised but ever with the yearning that all children of God may be led out to gather unto the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20).

Teachers of a past generation repeatedly showed that separation affects the believer in various spheres. In their day, ecclesiastical separation may have been more accepted than now, and so their emphasis may have been more often directed to the matrimonial bond, warning of the evil of the unequal yoke (2Cor. 6:14). Furthermore, they pointed out the error of association with the ungodly (or with unseparated believers) in business partnerships, trade unions and professional associations. These aspects of separation are much neglected today but the truth never changes and we need to apply ourselves to the practice of the teaching which is according to godliness (1Tim. 6:3) that God may be glorified in us.

No doubt, faithfulness in this matter, in any or all of its applications, will bring reproach, probably even more from disobedient believers than from worldly people, but is not this what is meant by the words of the Spirit "Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Heb. 13:13)?

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Psalm 1

Psalms 1 and 2 together can be regarded as a preface or introduction to the entire Psalter. The Psalms which follow tend to enlarge on the truths contained in the first two Psalms. Jewish tradition maintained that, originally, Psalms 1 and 2 constituted one Psalm.

The Blessed Man

Psalm 1 tells us of the way of life of the godly, righteous, blessed man. It tells us what he does and what he does not do. The word translated "blessed" in verse 1 is, in fact, plural, and we are being told by the Holy Spirit of the "blessednesses" or the "happinesses" of the man who is obedient to God. There was only one man, the only begotten, eternal and beloved Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was perfect in all His ways. He was undefiled and was completely and absolutely obedient to His Father at all times, He was obedient even unto death (Phil. 2:8.). The Lord always pleased and glorified His Father (Matt. 3:17; Jn. 8:29;

Jn. 17:4). There was no sin in the Lord Jesus Christ, He was “God with us” (Matt. 1:23), God manifest in flesh (1Tim. 3:16). He never ceased to be God, He was Holy, He could not sin (1Pet. 2:22; 2Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1Jn. 3:5). Only He could fulfil the description given in Psalm 1 of the perfect, godly, righteous man.

The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to in Psalm 2:2 as God’s “anointed”. Those who put their faith and trust in Him and in His finished work on the cross are blessed (Psalm 2:12). They are saved, because on the cross He suffered, bled and died as our substitute, paying the penalty for the sin of the whole world (Jn. 1:29; 1Jn. 1:7; 1Jn. 2:2). After three days He rose from the dead and is now seated on the right hand of the throne of God in heaven (Matt. 28:6; Heb. 12:2).

We learn in verse 1 of the things the blessed, godly and happy man does not do. There are things which the man who seeks to do the will of God and lead a life which is pleasing to Him, avoids getting involved in. The things we think about and spend our time doing, affect us. They influence our words, deeds and priorities. They help to determine the kind of people we become. The believer who gets his counsel from the Scriptures will think, behave and speak as God would have him to, for as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7), and “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34).

In the Word of God the Holy Spirit says to us “... be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Our minds will be transformed by reading and meditating on the written Word of God and being obedient to Him. The blessed, godly man does not walk “in the counsel of the ungodly” (v1). We must remember that the ungodly will, “... take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed” (Ps. 2:2). The blessed man obtains his counsel and guidance not from the world, but from prayerful study and meditation on the Word of God which, with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, he seeks to obey.

The blessed man does not stand “in the way of sinners” (v1). He leads a life which is separated from the world and to God (2Cor. 6:14-7:1). We are told in James 4:4 that whoever “will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” and in 1John 2:15,16, not to love the world nor the things that are in the world. There are places the separated believer does not go to, activities he does not get involved in, and people he should not needlessly spend time with, other than to tell them of the only way of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6). The separated believer allows the Lord Jesus Christ to be Lord of every aspect of his life (2Cor. 10:5).

There are so many blessings that accrue to a believer who, out of love and obedience to God, is truly separated from the world and to Him. Such a believer is increasingly blessed with grace, love and power. Through spending much time in prayer and with the written Word of God the separated believer increases in spiritual discernment and wisdom. He enjoys close, loving fellowship with other separated believers. They serve God together in a blessed, happy unity which is good and pleasant and which pleases God (Ps. 133:1). God says to separated believers, “... I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters ...” (2Cor. 6:17,18). We will be blessed if we “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2Cor. 7:1). We must eradicate things from our lives which would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit.

The blessed man does not sit “in the seat of the scornful” (v1). He does not scoff at or mock the things of God or make jokes about sin, righteousness, judgement, heaven or hell. He does not use the Word of God in a flippant, irreverent way to promote laughter.

Backsliding away from God is normally a gradual process and we see in verse 1 a gradual downward progression away from God, – walking, standing and then sitting. Peter, that changeable, volatile impetuous, lovable man, who was courageous and loved the Lord fervently, had said to Him, “Lo, we have left all, and followed Thee” (Luke 18:28). There came a time, however, when he followed the Lord “afar off”. Peter followed the Lord “afar off”, then sat down with the Lord’s enemies and denied Him three times. When the Lord looked at Peter he wept bitterly (Luke 22:54-62). Ultimately sin always brings sorrow. How

careful we must be to remember the admonition in 1Corinthians 10:12, which says, “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”.

A believer, being justified by faith has, “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). A believer is saved eternally and cannot lose his salvation (Jn. 3:36; 10:28,29). However, unconfessed, unforsaken sin can prevent the believer enjoying “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). By the grace of God, Peter repented of his sin and was graciously restored, by the Lord, to serve as a dependent servant (Jn. 21:15-19). The Lord in His love, grace, mercy and wisdom, can forgive and restore us when we fail Him. We read, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins” (1Jn. 1:9). If we are truly repentant He will forgive us and graciously use us again in His service.

Peter followed the Lord, but followed Him “afar off”. If we do not follow the Lord closely, seeking to know and obey His will as revealed to us in the Word of God, we shall backslide and gradually drift away from our Lord and Saviour. As believers we have the indwelling Holy Spirit (1Cor. 6:19) to teach us, lead us and empower us. If we ignore His guidance, or rely upon ourselves then we are sure to fail the Lord.

A backsliding believer who continues on the downward path will become less sensitive to sin, go further and further away from the Lord and become involved in things which he would have avoided in former times. Despite being attracted by all that the world has to offer, a backsliding believer will never be completely at ease in the company of unbelievers.

In verse 1 we see the negative side of a godly man’s life. In verse 2 the positive aspects of his life are brought before us. The man who is blessed delights “in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night”. Joshua was told, “meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein” (Josh. 1:8), and Timothy was told to “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (1Tim. 4:15), and he was to “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Tim. 2:15). The godly man does not simply read quickly through a passage in the Word of God. He reads carefully and, being guided by the Holy Spirit, he meditates prayerfully on what he has read, with the intention that what he has meditated on will influence and determine his thoughts, words and deeds.

The written Word of God does not change, for it is, “the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1Pet. 1:23). The truths found in the Bible, “are spiritually discerned” (1Cor. 2:14), and are revealed to believers by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The truths are eternal and unchanging. We read, “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89), and “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35).

The Scriptures are inspired by God (2Tim. 3:16). We read, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pet. 1:21). Not only were the writers inspired but the very words they used were divinely inspired. The Scriptures are “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). The Scriptures tell us the way of salvation, (Jn. 20:31; Eph. 2:8; 2Tim. 3:15). They give us assurance of our salvation (Jn. 3:36; 1Jn. 5:11-13). They tell us how to behave so that we might please God, both as individual believers and as assemblies of God’s people. The Scriptures also give us some insight into future events and the eternal state.

A believer who meditates on the Scriptures will profit spiritually. He will learn more of the will of God, and will experience joy and peace. In the Word of God a believer finds guidance, warning, encouragement and precious promises. The Word of God is “... quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). It is a lamp to our feet, it shows us our spiritual position and condition, and it is a light to our path, it shows us the way God would have us to go, (Ps. 119:105). We are enjoined in 1Peter 2:2 to “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby”.

As a result of study and meditation the Word of God will be retained in the mind of a believer and the Holy Spirit will enable the believer to use it for the blessing of himself and others. The believer should pray for his meditation to be controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit that God might be glorified and the Lord Jesus Christ exalted. David prayed, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer", (Ps. 19:14), and he wrote "I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches" (Ps. 63:6). Meditation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, on the Lord's Person and work and on His soon return, when he will take us to be with himself forever (1Thess. 4:16,17), will cause a believer to experience feelings of awe, wonder, gratitude, joy and love for Him, and will please and glorify God.

So that we might have time to study and meditate on the Word of God we need to discipline and organise our lives. This means choosing between alternative ways of spending our time. We need to exercise a spiritually profitable stewardship of time.

The blessed man is like, "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season" (v3). There is nothing haphazard about where the blessed man is, he is "planted". He is where God wants him to be, and is cared for and watched over by God. He does the will of God, and is obedient to Him. He is "by the rivers of water". The roots of a tree go down into the soil and absorb water and nutrients. We do not see the tree feeding on these but we see the results as the tree grows and flourishes. Its leaves are healthy and, at the appropriate time, it bears fruit. So it is with the blessed man who feeds on the written Word of God. He bears the fruit of the Spirit, which is, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22,23). As a result of using his time to feed on the Word of God and being enabled by the Holy Spirit to obey that Word, the blessed man prospers spiritually. His thoughts, deeds and words are controlled by God. He glorifies God in his life and is a channel of blessing both to believers and to the unbelievers he meets. He does those "good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10), and he seeks to add to his "faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2Pet. 1:5-7).

The Ungodly

Having directed our attention in the first three verses to the blessed man, the Holy Spirit now brings the ungodly before us in the last three verses. What a difference there is, and the Psalm which began with the word "blessed" ends with the word "perish".

We read in verse 4, "The ungodly are not so". These words immediately tell us that there is a marked contrast between the godly, righteous, man who is blessed and those who are ungodly. The ungodly are "like the chaff which the wind driveth away". How this description contrasts with the blessed, godly man who is likened to a tree which has been deliberately planted where it is, and is constantly cared for and supplied with water and necessary nourishment. The tree is alive, stable, growing, flourishing and bearing fruit. The chaff is dead and blown about by the wind. The ungodly are unstable and follow changing fads and fashions. They are never in a settled, happy, stable condition, and ultimately will be eternally separated from God in the Lake of Fire.

In verse 5 we read that, "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous". The ungodly will be found guilty. They have not been clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord constantly watches over and cares for those who have been saved. We read, "the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (v6). The Lord knows every aspect and activity of the blessed man. Job could say "He knoweth the way that I take" (Job 23:10). God leads and guides the godly man. He is constantly working all things together for good for a believer (Rom. 8:28), and He is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

At the end of the Psalm we read these terrible words, “but the way of the ungodly shall perish”. How blessed are those of us who have been saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8). We know that, by the grace of God, we shall be in heaven eternally where there “is fulness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11). We must be alive to our blessings and responsibilities. We should meditate on the Word of God that we might prosper spiritually and bring forth fruit to the glory of God, and strive to bring others to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer who is living in constant anticipation of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ will study the Word of God at every opportunity. His thoughts will be occupied with the Person, work, beauties and perfections of the Lord.

May God help us to so order our lives that we know the blessings of the man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD”, in which he meditates day and night. Then, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, our lives will exalt the Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father, and we shall be channels of blessing to others.

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Help for Young Believers

(2) Love for the People of God

“By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35)

It is evident that not a few unsaved people have some respect for believers whose lives are consistent with their profession, yet it cannot be said that they love the saints of God, as such. One definite mark of conversion to God is the birth of a love for God’s people, simply because they belong to Christ. Love to God creates love toward His children, and love for the saints results in a desire to be in their company.

Who of us, with any degree of experience, has seen this occur with those who have been recently saved? Not only were they shy before when in the presence of saved people, but they experienced no interest whatever in their conversation because they had not the nature to enjoy those spiritual things which Christians spoke about. Upon receiving Christ, however, they experienced in themselves the truth, that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2Cor. 5:17). Others noticed this, too, in their manifested desire for new company. Even when morally clean and upright people (i.e. in the eyes of men) are saved, it is soon manifest that they have an affection for the Lord’s people. This was totally absent prior to their conversion when they lived in self-righteousness.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1John 3:14). This is not the only test given us in the Word by which we may try our profession of faith in Christ, but it is one that is very practical. Our love in that respect is not based upon their amiable character, nor on their conformity to our ideals, but upon our mutual relationship ... they are our brethren and sisters ... we are of the same spiritual family. We may meet with one of another nationality, or another colour. It may be that we cannot speak a word of their language, and just use signs to communicate simple thoughts to each other, yet when we are assured that we belong to the same spiritual family, that we know and love the same Lord and Saviour, immediately we sense a mutual love.

Love, like other virtues, may be present in greater or lesser degree. It may also be cultivated and grow, or it may be neglected and diminish. Is it not true that some of us have failed to cultivate our love to the saints? In our early days after our conversion, we experienced a thrill of pleasure upon meeting a fellow saint. If we were naturally talkative, our conversation was about Christ and about something spiritual, and this only made to increase and abound our love one for the other. It was a delight to meet.

Has something come in to chill that mutual love? If so, can you afford to allow it to continue? Why not, out

of love for each other, as brethren, seek humbly to confess your fault in the matter? There is always some degree of fault on both sides. Why not begin by confessing yours, seeking grace from God to lay no blame on the other party? What a joy it would be to both of you to be able once again to confirm your love for each other.

We should love all God's people, regardless to their associations – not only those with whom we are associated in assembly fellowship. If the position of a brother is an unscriptural one, we cannot overlook that, but we should surely love him because he is Christ's, and seek to win any such to walk in a more scriptural path. This we shall never accomplish by showing hostility towards them, nor can we hope to help them by associating with them in what is wrong. Have we not failed greatly in helping fellow saints, from a lack of living interest in their spiritual good? A sense of genuine love shown by us, is the weightiest part of any argument.

An unforgiving spirit is evidence of a lack of love. Self-justification usually indicates self-love. The perfect love of Christ is our pattern, which we may learn much from the examples given in Scripture of godly men whose love for the saints at times was sorely tried, yet survived in the midst of their tears. This led to the softening of others who may have offended us!

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Questions and Answers

Question: "Do the ninety and nine sheep represent saved people" (Luke 15:4)?

Answer: The parables of Luke 15, were spoken by the Lord on the occasion when the Pharisees and Scribes murmured saying, "This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (15:2).

The lost sheep, the lost silver and the lost son, represent the publicans and sinners who were being received by the Lord upon their repentance. The ninety and nine sheep, the nine pieces of silver and the elder son, represent the Pharisees and Scribes who thought that they needed no repentance. The elder son murmured as did the Pharisees and Scribes.

It is to be observed that the shepherd left, "The ninety and nine in the wilderness" (15:4), not in the shelter of the fold. The Lord described them as, "Ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (15:7). They represent people who are not saved. They never repented.

The Lord came to call sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). The apostles preached; "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). The commission is to preach; "Repentance and remission of sins" (Luke 24:47). If we are to see people genuinely saved we must preach repentance.

It is to be observed that the language which the Lord used in Luke 15 stressed that joy in heaven is – "Over one sinner that repenteth" (15:7,10). The parables of Luke 15 consider the repentant sinner as wholly restored to God.

... And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

(Acts 17:30)

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How long will thou refuse to humble thyself before Me?

(Exodus 10:3)

The Man who was Proud

Humility is a rare quality to be found in any person. Pride however will readily express itself not only towards men, but more notably towards the God of heaven as evidenced in the Pharaoh of Egypt to whom the above question was first asked just prior to the Israelites liberation under the hand of Moses.

He was arrogant, he was proud; he had wealth, position and power and had enforced the servitude of the Israelites as his bond slaves. He believed himself to be God, incredibly, thinking he could dictate as he pleased until he was made to understand he was but a fickle, mortal man whom God had allowed to rise up in prominence so that through this king's hardness of heart, He might manifest His power to the world (Exodus 9:16,17). What a death blow to anyone's pride!

Despite numerous opportunities and admonitions, he resisted and refused to bow his will to acknowledge the requirements of the living God to release His captive people. He had previously boasted ***"Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice..."*** (Exodus 5:2). Dogs know their masters and sheep their shepherd's voice, but that a man should not know or confess his Creator is a most serious situation indeed that such contempt should be shown.

This Pharaoh like so many after, dared defy the God of heaven and brought upon himself and his people swift destruction in the form of those ten judgments that you may be familiar with, real and sure demonstrations of divine power that manifested this man's impotence for what it was. In God's righteous dealings, he was soon to lose his cattle, his firstborn son, his army and his kingdom! He was to learn the hard way: ***"for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased;"***

The Man who was Humble

In refreshing contrast to the previous individual, we can consider One who was truly self humble, yet never proud. The following is written of Him in Philippians 2.

We read: ***"Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:"*** – He being the Son of God and possessing all the essential qualities of deity, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, accepted worship, honour and glory as One on equality with God the Father. Yet from such a glorious realm He took a mighty step – ***"But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."*** Thus set against His supreme position in the universe, He expressed an attitude of self-effacement by veiling that outward mode of glory, embracing as the sinless incarnate Man, all the essential features of a bond servant toward God the Father, in a position of subjection and obedience on earth in His perfect body in order to fulfil the will of God on earth.

We read on: ***"And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross."*** Having proved His true manhood in the spheres of family life, working, social and spiritual life as seen in the Gospel accounts He humbled Himself yet further to the shameful and despicable death of the cross. He bowed to death, who death could not command, being without sin, yet offered Himself on the cross, a sacrifice, for sinners like us.

In response: ***"God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That ... every knee should bow ... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"*** (Philippians 2:6-11). God has vindicated Him by resurrection and extolled Him, the Man who pleased Him well.

The Lord Jesus Christ showed by His self-effacement in a most profound way that: ***"he that humbleth himself shall be exalted"*** (Luke 18:14).

Will we Humble Ourselves?

We may not be in the position of a Pharaoh, but one thing is certain: we are all prone to pride in its various out workings. The original question can truly be asked us by God Himself, as to how long we will refuse to acknowledge Him and bow to His will as revealed in His word. We should readily guard against considering that we know better than Him. He knows our individual frame, our origin and our destiny and has our good and blessing at heart.

The Israelites were brought out of Egypt by blood and by power on that Passover night when Pharaoh lost his firstborn son; no blood of a lamb was applied to the door posts or lintel of his house or many others in Egypt that solemn night. Any who thought they knew better and refused to follow the command soon learnt the folly of refusing to humble themselves before God, who must and will punish sin.

The Israelites as Pharaoh's bond slaves in Egypt's iron furnace were powerless to free themselves. God used this crisis to teach them and ourselves of our true spiritual plight to the mastery of sin over which we have no power and often no desire to overcome or forsake. He only could supply the means of redemption.

The Lord Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, the firstborn over all creation by pre-eminence, as a faithful bond servant to God the Father upon earth, surrendered His life on the cross to become the ultimate Passover Lamb for all mankind. He died and arose as the firstborn from among the dead, that we might know liberation from the shackles of the devil so characterised in Pharaoh. ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*** (John 3:16). The question is, will we humble ourselves before the God of Heaven, confess to Him our sin and accept the Lamb of His providing, the Lord Jesus Christ, to deal with our sin? If we do, we will find ourselves blessed beyond measure as ***"Joint-heirs with Christ"*** (Romans 8:17).

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