

The Old Paths – January / March : 2019 – № 21

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Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in Thy word. Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God. Uphold me according unto Thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

(Psalm 119:114-116)



From the Editor’s Desk

“The redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23)

In this lovely chapter there are three references to the future glory of the children of God.

“But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raise up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). Presently, we are to reckon the body to be dead. As indwelt by the Holy Spirit we have power available to mortify the deeds of the body. Resurrection is mentioned twice in this verse. “Raised up Jesus”; this is historically and refers to His humanity and humility. “Raised up Christ”; this is representatively and officially and refers to His glory and power. This is the pledge that our mortal body will be quickened. We will not be left in “The body of this death” (Rom. 7:24). At present, by the indwelling Spirit our spirits are quickened. At the rapture the great change will take place. Sleeping saints will be raised and living ones shall be changed. The body will be quickened to remove every impediment to the enjoyment of eternal life at the RAPTURE.

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17). Our relationship as “heirs of God”, in all His holiness and righteousness is remarkable. “Joint-heirs with Christ”, as the result of His work is cause for unending praise. He will share His future glory with us. This means that in this life we “suffer with Him”. That we suffer for Him is a great privilege. The context of this verse is that we suffer with Him as part of a groaning creation. Those things which grieve our blessed Lord, grieve us as well. Creation has never known freedom since the fall of man. It is in a state of death, decay, corruption and agony. The birth “pain” of creation awaits release from bondage. We groan and grieve, waiting for the moment of the full revelation of sonship. We shall be revealed with the Lord as the Sons of God at His appearing. Present suffering, patiently waiting, we look on to future glory. A quickened body and glorious liberty will be a great RELEASE.

“And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). Faithful believers do not complain but we “groan”, we yearn, we wait with earnest expectation. We already have the “firstfruits of the spirit”. He is the earnest, the pledge of things to come. The full harvest has not yet arrived but the quality of the firstfruits guarantee a vast harvest. We have the foretaste of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. The Spirit of sonship is ours in this sphere of suffering. We await the physical conformity to “the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). Our bodies purchased by His precious blood, belong to Christ. At His coming these bodies will be changed, redeemed by power, we shall be like Him. This is the fulness of REDEMPTION.

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Earthquakes of Scripture (4)

Introduction

In the last article we looked at the first three of the five tribulation earthquakes¹. This article will consider the next two earthquakes recorded in Revelation, before studying the earthquake associated with the coming of the King in power and great glory.

Rev. 11:19 – The Earthquake associated with the seventh trumpet

The storm clouds are now gathering and the ultimate storm is about to break, yet John is permitted to see the temple of God opened in heaven and within was ‘the ark of His testament’ (covenant). What a reassurance to John in the dark scene before him! God was in absolute control, and still with His people in all their changing circumstances, and about to manifest Himself on their behalf!

Perhaps it would be a good thing for us, as the people of God today, to remember that, despite the circumstances in our lives, circumstances which will never bear comparison to events in this tribulation period, God is still on the throne and still *for us*. We, like John, should look up!

Great hail

The three phenomena, lightning, voices, thundering, associated with the seventh seal earthquake (Rev. 8:5) are also experienced at this seventh trumpet earthquake, but with the addition here of great hail. Exodus chapter 9 verses 22-35 speak of the judgement of hail on the land of Egypt, with the word ‘hail’ being used twelve times. Utter devastation was the outcome there (vv. 24-25) yet here we read of *great* hail. The intensity of events increases by the time the next earthquake occurs², for there we read of great hail ‘every stone about the weight of a talent’.

The weight of a talent varies throughout Biblical time, but the Hebrew talent weighed about 52kg. The largest hailstone ever recorded on Earth was slightly less than 1kg, just larger than a tennis ball. Just

imagine hail raining down on the Earth, each one over 50 times heavier than the largest one yet recorded in Earth's history! This plague of hail is now termed 'exceeding great'³.

Rev. 16:18-21 – The greatest Earthquake experienced on Earth – the seventh bowl

This earthquake is unprecedented in its greatness; no earthquake event in human history can be remotely compared to it. Today we measure earthquakes in two ways: the Mercalli scale measures the observed effects on a relative scale of 1 to 12, 12 being 'extreme catastrophe – total damage'; the Richter scale measures the magnitude of the earthquake, and the energy released. The observable effects of this earthquake will be as never seen before, and the measured effects will go off the scales of human instruments⁴.

Atmospheric and terrestrial effects of divine judgement on a rebellious humanity will now intensify⁵. Verse 19 describes widespread urban devastation, 'the cities of the nations shall fall'. Further proof of this increasing intensity of judgement is seen in verse 20, continuing and almost completing the process begun in Revelation chapter 6, verses 12-14.

There, in the first tribulation earthquake, 'every mountain and island were moved out of their places', here 'every island fled away, and the mountains were not found'. The closing verse of the chapter seems to indicate a recognition that God is behind all these happenings, yet we read of men blaspheming God. No mention is made of repentance, just absolute and utter defiance⁶!

Zech. 14:4-5 – The Earthquake caused by the coming of the King to the Mount of Olives

Chronologically, this earthquake appears to the present writer to be the last one mentioned in scripture. In its context, the scene is set right at the very end of the tribulation period. The nations will be drawn by God against Israel⁷, infected through the centuries with the virus of hatred for the 'people of God'. The opening verses of Zechariah chapter 14 give a picture of defeat. Surely, there is no reprieve from this situation: property is confiscated; womanhood violated; and the population scattered and demoralized. Yet everything is under divine control, and, in God's time, there is divine intervention. All nations may be against the people of God (v2) but, at the last moment, the Lord intervenes to fight against those nations (v3).

The Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives is 'split in two' by this earthquake, as the King Himself descends from heaven. The words of verse 4 clearly indicate the personal, visible, and bodily return of Christ to Earth. Here the very last place His feet trod in His first coming⁸ will be the first place He will touch at this second phase of His second coming.

The cleaving of the mountain will initially create an escape route for the people of God in that day; they will fear for their lives because of the presence of the Beast, the signs of the great battle looming, and also because of the earthquake. This newly created valley will remain a witness to divine deliverance and power.

The cleaving of the Red Sea⁹ was another witness of divine deliverance and power to the people of God when under great duress. That cleaving, or dividing, lasted less than twenty-four hours¹⁰, but the cleaving of Olivet will be permanent. The reference in verse 5 to the historical earthquake in the days of Uzziah (Amos 1:1) and to the fear it produced, again gives evidence that this earthquake, and everything associated with it in the passage, must be taken literally.

Great changes

This earthquake and the coming of the King to Olivet will be associated with great tectonic, natural, and topographical/physical changes.

- **Tectonic (vv. 4-5)**

A great east-west fault and a massive north-south displacement of the mountain will occur. Recent geological studies have confirmed an enormous east-west fault line in the region, which runs right through

the Mount of Olives. Yet the God that created the existing world from the previously non-existing in six days, hardly needs a pre-existing fault line to move a mountain! God can use nature, but He needs no help from nature to achieve His purposes. Nature itself depends on God!

- **Natural (vv. 6-7)**

That day will be marked by a distinctive character, and the presence of the Lord. It seems there will be an evening-like twilight, ‘not day and not night’, which will then brighten at evening. These disturbances of the laws of nature will be a fore-runner of coming days of national restoration, and an end to the nation’s mourning¹¹.

- **Topographical/physical (vv. 8-10)**

Living waters will flow continually out of Jerusalem (v8) and a fountain will flow out of the house of the Lord (Joel 3:18). Verse 10 speaks of great physical changes to the immediate landscape, creating a vast plain, and elevating the city itself above all the land around¹².

There are some interesting comparisons and contrasts between the Lord’s ascent from Olivet and His descent to the same mountain. We have listed some below:

	Acts 1:8-12	Zechariah 14:4-6
1	Historical: 2,000 years ago	Prophetic: at least 7 years from now
2	The Lord’s last time on Earth in the first advent	The Lord’s first time on Earth in the second advent
3	The Lord was taken up; ascended	The Lord came down; descended
4	A cloud received Him out of their sight	He will come <i>on</i> and <i>with</i> clouds ¹³
5	He went into heaven	He came from heaven ¹⁴
6	A <i>few</i> of His own saw Him go up	<i>Every</i> eye shall see Him ¹⁵
7	He ascended to heaven alone	He will return with a great company of saints and angels ¹⁶

Conclusion and Spiritual Significance

What can we learn for our present spiritual benefit?

Generally

Earthquakes are all demonstrations of divine power and sovereignty, while some specifically relate to judgement, deliverance, and the immediate presence of God. These ‘natural’ phenomena cause great fear to those affected by them in our day, as they will in the tribulation period, but with greater intensity. But will this draw men to God and lead men to repentance? The lessons from past earthquakes, and the biblical record of future tribulation earthquakes would suggest not. It is easy to acknowledge the ‘hand of God’ in a vague sort of way in a natural event and to view God from a distance, rather than acknowledge Him as near in a personal and intimate relationship.

These great forces that rock the Earth put man into perspective, and show his utter weakness and helplessness. In days of uncertainty and constant change, the God of heaven is in absolute and final control, and, soon, will fully manifest the eternal victory over human power and evil. Ultimately world-dominating powers and confederacies will be overthrown. All levels of society will be affected, whether great or small – none can evade God’s judgements. Reality will begin to set in and men will eventually realize that there is a

God in heaven. Atheism, humanism, agnosticism – indeed any ‘ism’, will have no answer; neither will religion!

What ensues from the Olivet earthquake shows that Israel has, and always will have, a special place in the heart of God and in the furtherance of His purposes on Earth. God’s name will be vindicated, His glory served, and His Son manifested. When divine grace and mercy are spurned, man will soon feel divine justice and retribution.

Specifically

Take heart, fellow believer; the wicked will not triumph for ever, even though present day events seem to point that way. The persecution, despising and hatred for the people of God in that day, as in our present day, will only last for a limited time. God’s definite prophetic programme on Earth has finality in view. As believers, when part of this programme is being worked out on Earth, we shall have already been raptured. God’s programme also encompasses an eternal home in heaven for us. Let us live our daily lives now in the glorious anticipation of that coming day!

¹ Rev. 6:12-16; 8:5; 11:13

² Rev. 16:18

³ Rev. 16:21

⁴ Seismometers measure earthquake amplitude/magnitude

⁵ Hag. 2:6; Isa. 24:17-21; Joel 3:16

⁶ The reader might want to make a further study of Revelation chapter 16 by noticing the occurrence of the word ‘great’. It occurs eleven times in the chapter, describing eight separate subjects. The references are vv. 1, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18 (×2), 19 (×2), 21 (×2). These certainly will be ‘great’ and memorable times!

⁷ Zech. 14:2

⁸ Acts 1:8-12

⁹ Exod. 14:21; Ps. 136:13-15

¹⁰ Exod. 14:21; cf. 14:27

¹¹ Isa. 60:18-22; Joel 3:12-16

¹² Micah 4:1-2

¹³ Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7

¹⁴ Rev. 19:1-16

¹⁵ Rev. 1:7

¹⁶ Matt. 16:27; 1Thess. 3:13

Concluded

Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

(Hebrews 12:28,29)

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 7:9-16

We continue our consideration of Stephen's masterly address in response to the Sanhedrin. They had charged him of blasphemy against: the temple at Jerusalem; the law; and the customs of Moses. We have reviewed Stephen's references to incidents in the life of Abraham. Now we shall consider his spiritual application of references in the life of Joseph.

(b) The Joseph section (v.9-16) – Divine Preservation

This section has six mentions of Egypt. Again Stephen seeks to show to the Sanhedrin that God, in the outworking of His purpose, is not confined to a temple, to the city of Jerusalem, or to the land of Israel.

In verse 9, Stephen refers to the events recorded in Genesis chapter 37: "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him". The clear inference in stating this is that the ten sons of Jacob, who sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver, prefigure the Sanhedrin who had recently paid Judas Iscariot thirty pieces of silver to betray the Lord Jesus Christ. The patriarchs' jealousy of Joseph resulted in all the fathers of the nation of Israel eventually relocating to Egypt where, much later, all their descendants had become enslaved. Although all his natural brothers were opposed to Joseph, yet we have the compensating fact that "God was with him". This in no way diminished his sense of rejection; nor his afflictions as a slave and prisoner. Yet God was with Joseph personally in all his trials. In this context we remember the words of the divine promise to believers, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). The Psalmist, David, could say, "When my father and my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take me up" (Psa. 27:10).

That Joseph was despised and rejected by his brethren has obvious parallels in the experience of the Lord Jesus, although His was much greater in degree and infamy. Stephen therefore continues to provide his summary of the life of Joseph, namely that God "delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house". Joseph, who had suffered for righteousness sake, discovers that God was with him granting him prophecy and promotion, Genesis chapter 41.

The God who was with Joseph in the seven years of plenty was also with him in the seven years of famine, the dearth over Egypt and Canaan, when Jacob and his sons "found no sustenance". However, "Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt" and so "he sent out our fathers first". This refers to their first visit to Egypt as recorded in Genesis chapter 42, when Joseph dealt with them in government and severity without revealing himself to his brothers who had still to face up to the enormity of their crimes. The parallel in relation to behaviour of the nation of Israel in response to the Lord's first coming in incarnation is obvious as "He is despised and rejected of men; A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: And we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Isa. 53:3).

Stephen then stresses the intention of his summary from the life of Joseph. He refers to the subsequent return of his brothers to Egypt when "at the **second time** Joseph was made known to his brethren". This theme of the "**second time**" will also recur when we come to consider the 'Moses section' of Stephen's address.

Is it possible that those members of the Sanhedrin are beginning to pick up on the theme of Stephen's message? But it is unlikely that any of these who are learned in the Scriptures remembered the words, "And I will pour upon the house of David, And upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: And they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, And they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, And shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). Had they done so, they would have made the connection that there will be a **second time** for the Lord Jesus Christ and His dealings with the nation of Israel and, through them, this world.

Stephen refers to Joseph's father, Jacob, going down into Egypt with the entire family to stay. This was different to God's earlier instruction to Isaac not to go down to Egypt (Gen. 26:2). Here Stephen is showing that God, by later revelation, caused Jacob to move in a different direction to Abraham and Isaac. The Sanhedrin had a view of divine revelation that was restricted by a nationalistic traditionalism. They had a self-centred and superior view of the world and were oblivious to how God's revelation progresses over time. Presently they have totally missed the fact that Messiah had been here and, like Joseph's brethren, they did not recognise the One who had come to bless them!

Again there are some details in Stephen's address that may require clarification. He mentions (v14) that Jacob's family was "threescore and fifteen souls", i.e. 75 in total. This includes the five sons of Manasseh and Ephraim who were born in Egypt. The "souls that came **with** Jacob into Egypt" were 66 in total (Gen. 46:26). However, the figure of 70 given in the verse following includes Jacob, Joseph and his 2 sons, (Gen. 46:27). The grand total of 70 is again given in Deuteronomy 10:22, "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude". So there are reasons and explanations for the different totals in the various references. Those who use these differences to make spurious contentions that there are 'mistakes in the Bible' show, not their cleverness, but their ignorance and prejudice. Such people today are very like those of the Sanhedrin then: they only see what they want to see because they have already made up their minds to disregard Scripture and despise the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let us return to the theme running through Stephen's address; "So Jacob went down into Egypt", after specific revelation from God to do so, Genesis 46:1-4 refers. Here Joseph, who had been rejected of his brethren, is at the right hand of power for the blessing of others and now, especially, of his brethren. This foreshadows future Messianic blessing for Israel, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns the **second time**.

That first generation that went down to sojourn there all died in Egypt and never returned to Canaan, except in death to be buried. Jacob was buried at Machpelah (Gen. 50:1-14) so Stephen's reference to them being "carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem" has also been used, by some scoffers, to allege that there are 'mistakes in the Bible'. While true believers know that this cannot be so, nevertheless it may be helpful to some if we also address this allegation.

Details about Abraham's purchase of "the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan", as a burial place for Sarah, are given in Genesis chapter 23. The purchase of "a parcel of a field, where he [Jacob] had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father" is detailed in Genesis 33:19. These events took place with an interval of some eighty years between them. Stephen was handling facts known to Jews at that time, facts which were not challenged by those who most assuredly would have seized on any apparent inaccuracy. The fact that they did not is therefore very important. It seems most likely that sometime subsequent to Abraham's initial purchase of the burial ground, possibly after his death as recorded for us in Genesis 25:7-11, the original owners reasserted their claim and repossessed the ground in which the burial cave was located. Perhaps they assumed that it was a burial ground for Sarah and Abraham only. Rather than dispute any rights of ownership, Jacob appears to have repurchased the field containing the ancestral burying ground, therefore becoming another "**second time**" in Stephen's address.

One thing is clear; the sons of Jacob never considered that they ever belonged to the Egyptian world! While the entire family had gone to Egypt at the direction of God, they had certainly not become Egyptians. We remember what the Lord said about His disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16). Christians have to live and work in this world, however. Indeed, they should be the most honest and trustworthy citizens, employees, neighbours, etc., but should ever remember that, as strangers and pilgrims here, they belong to another world, not to this one.

In the providential dealings of God, He took a family of shepherds into Egypt and, over time, made them into a mighty nation. God, while outworking His purpose, overturned the opposition of Joseph's brethren

for their benefit. Joseph could later say about their cruelty: “ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

Stephen is soon to feel the fury of the Sanhedrin and his life, like that of the Saviour, will not be spared. Yet God will use the martyrdom of Stephen in the conviction and conversion of Saul of Tarsus, later the Apostle Paul, to bring blessing to the Gentile nations of the then known world.

In the next paper we shall consider the ‘Moses section’ of Stephen’s address. This shows how God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to be His own distinctive people, and, again, there will be lessons for us today.

(To be continued D.V.)

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THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Paper 7(vi) – THE PURITY

Continuing the SEVEN forms of assembly discipline.

We have considered the church of God character of the local assembly to reflect authority, discipline and purity essential for the enjoyment of the presence of God. This standard of God’s Holiness has never been lowered nor altered. After hundreds of years of assembly testimony, sin morally or doctrinally is still sin before God and cannot be tolerated.

The SEVEN forms of assembly discipline are as follows:

1. A brother overtaken in a fault.
2. Personal offence between two believers.
3. Those that are unruly or walk disorderly.
4. Those who cause offence by unscriptural teaching.
5. Serious moral offenders.
6. Unruly and vain talkers and deceivers.
7. Doctrinal evil.

Six of these have already been covered. We shall now consider the seventh and most serious aspect of assembly discipline.

7. Doctrinal Evil

The first major case of false doctrine in Acts is outlined for us in Acts 15. “And certain men which came down from Judea taught (kept on teaching) the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”. This was fundamental error taught by those who claimed authority from the Word of God. These men were using that which signifies the cutting off of the flesh in the O.T. in fleshly pride to cut off the saints of God. Had this false doctrine been tolerated it would have resulted in major division between Jew and Gentiles in the church age. “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them” (Acts 15:2). These are strong words meaning there was an insurrection and rebellion.

The introduction of false doctrine brings division and contention. The resulting meeting with the apostles and elders at Jerusalem where these men came from shows that it is essential to trace error to its source.

We must scripturally judge the root, not just the fruit. Taking with them Titus, an uncircumcised Greek as a specimen of God's saving grace was very wise. The charge was clearly set before the meetings. "Certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:24).

This meeting at Jerusalem was unique in apostolic authority and guidance. Such a meeting and letter do not set a N.T. precedent for us who have the full revelation of Scripture. In fact, we now have the inspired letter to the Galatians which states; "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). In Acts 15, the godly order of a Spirit controlled meeting prevailed. "The multitude kept silence" (v12) the elders stated what the scriptures taught; "As it is written" (v15). The matter was settled to the united agreement of "the apostles, and elders, with the whole church" (Acts 15:22).

Fundamental doctrinal error is always an attack in some way, upon the Person or work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles record for us the apostle's doctrine and fundamental teaching from which any departure cannot be tolerated. At Galatia there was an attack upon the sufficiency of the work of Jesus Christ to bring about eternal salvation. At Corinth there was an attack upon His Lordship and Headship. Other N.T. writings develop the teaching of the Holy Spirit concerning the Deity of the Son of God, the Humanity of the Son of Man, the fundamentals of His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, the imminence of the pre-tribulation rapture, His future literal earthly kingdom and eternal glory. The assembly is the witness and propagator for the maintenance of the truth of the great mystery of godliness, seen in our Lord Jesus Christ (1Tim. 3:15-16).

In dealing with false doctrine, we must carefully distinguish between those who persistently are teaching and those who may occasionally be misled into accepting their erroneous doctrine. Those who unwittingly fall into accepting false teaching may be recovered by patiently pointing out the truth as taught in scriptures if they are willing to repent and obey.

- (1) "Charge *some* that they teach no other doctrine" tell them to stop teaching fictitious fabrications and speculative nonsense. (1Tim. 1:3-5).
- (2) "*Some* having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm". These are like marksmen who deliberately aim at the wrong object. As Travellers they have turned off to another path. In their ignorant pomposity and dogmatic assertions, they lack any godly sincerity. (1Tim. 1:3,6-7).
- (3) "*Some* having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck". These have deliberately pulled up the anchor, cast away the compass and instead of pursuing a straight line according to scripture, they are rudderless, tossed by the wind and wave of heresy against the Author of Truth; they "blaspheme" and make shipwreck (1Tim. 1:19-20). This is obviously more serious than v6. Authority is given for the public naming of these individuals in v20, "Of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme". This includes the excommunication of those false teachers from the assembly. So serious is this blasphemous teaching that it merited apostolic action under God allowing Satan to damage the wellbeing of those who imperil the welfare of the saints by antagonistic teaching relative to the Person and Work of Christ.

It must be stressed that those in Acts 15 who taught that circumcision was essential for salvation should not have been in the assembly as they could not themselves have been saved by faith alone in Christ. Paul states that before conversion he was a "blasphemer" (1Tim. 1:13). Therefore in the same chapter, those who "blaspheme" (1Tim. 1:20) were unsaved men from which the assembly must be cleansed. We do not have any apostles present with us in assemblies today. However we do have the apostolic doctrine and guidance to guard the purity of doctrine. Believers must be preserved from false teaching publicly in the assembly and privately in our homes.

The power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is inherent in the assembly to excommunicate any who are persistent in false teaching to the destruction of the flock (Acts 20:28-31). Such a person under this discipline is deprived of the fellowship of saints. He is unworthy of the privileges of assembly protection. The word for “learn” (1Tim. 1:20) means educative remedial discipline so that he is not driven away without opportunity of repentance.

“He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2John 9-10). We must guard the doctrinal purity of the assembly and we should not allow false teachers access to our homes. The doctrine of the Christ; His Person, as the sent One of God, His abiding Manhood, the confession of the Father and the Son is the indispensable test of fellowship. This is a warning against receiving false teachers even into our homes lest they frustrate the teaching of the truth. “Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error [delusion, deceit, deception]” (1John 4:6). These are professed progressive thinkers, claiming super gnosis trying to undermine the purity of doctrine of Christ already acquired and enjoyed even by the sister in her home. They “come”, not as callers, but as teachers. They are to be given no greeting, approval or encouragement. Love of the truth involves hatred of error.

God hates false doctrine. “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Rev. 2:6). “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate [utterly detest]” (Rev. 2:15). “Nichol” = to conquer, “laitous” = the people. These men set themselves up as leaders, teachers, lords and masters over the assembly of God’s people. “Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence (only used here and of Christ – Col. 1:18) among them” (3John 9) “prating against us with malicious (evil) words” (v10).

These “victorious” people introduced their “deeds” (works) and were judged by the church at Ephesus. However at Pergamos their “deeds” were evidently tolerated and became established “doctrine”. This proves the link between evil works allowed which will become established in the form of evil words expressed in “doctrine”. This was a system of control, clergy and laity, lording over God’s heritage, drawing away disciples after them. This shows the danger of a pastor system of those who profess ability in advanced teaching because they have learned schoolboy Hebrew or Greek at Bible College. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans manifests a spirit of self-interest and fleshly promotion. The Lord hates it.

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MISINTERPRETED TEXTS

1Peter 3:21 – “Baptism doth also now save us”

In 1Peter 3:20-21, the Apostle Peter is speaking of the circumstances of Noah and his family, the ark and the flood. “The like figure whereunto even baptism doeth also now save us [R.V. ‘which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism’] (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer [R.V. margin, ‘appeal’] of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ”. Baptism is therefore the “answer” or “appeal” made by the conscience of the believer against everything contrary to his identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

Thus the believer is thereby saved, not from the doom of his sins, but from an evil conscience, by his obedience to the Lord’s command concerning the ordinance. This passage is likewise a testimony to the Scriptural mode of baptism; for it speaks of the ordinance as ‘a corresponding figure’ (lit., “corresponding type”) to the similarly typical representation of burial and resurrection in the case of Noah and his family, and the waters which surrounded them.

Baptism bears no relation to the Jewish rite of circumcision, nor has baptism taken the place of circumcision. Jews, who as such, had been circumcised on the eighth day, were baptized after they had believed on Christ.

If there is any analogy it lies in this, that, as Jews were circumcised because they were children of Abraham, so believers were baptized because they are children of God.

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He Faileth Not

Faint not, Forget not, Fear not. All these exhortations are needed by us, for so often we do faint, forget and fear. How refreshing and strengthening it is to turn our eyes upward to One Who,

Faileth Not

In the closing chapters of Deuteronomy, we have Moses' last words to the children of Israel. Great enemies are before them as they are about to enter the land of Canaan, but Moses says, "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will NOT FAIL THEE, nor forsake thee" (Deut. 31:6). And again to Joshua in verse 8 he said, "The LORD, He it is that doth go with before thee; He will be with thee, He will NOT FAIL THEE." How could God fail His own redeemed people and break His Promise? So with God *before them* and God *with them*, into the land they went to victory and to the possession of their inheritance. Of the God Who never failed His earthly people, we can say, "This God is our God for ever and ever" (Psalm 48:14).

But a Christian may say, "I know that God will not fail me, but what if I fail Him?" How wonderful to discover that even man's failure cannot alter God's purposes nor disannul His Promises. Eight hundred years had passed after God, through Moses, so encouraged the people as they entered the land. These eight hundred years were marked by much failure on Israel's part. Then, in a dark, dark day, the Word of God came, "The just LORD is in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity: every morning doth He bring His judgment to light, HE FAILETH NOT; but the unjust knoweth no shame" (Zeph. 3:5). God will chasten and correct His people for their sin, but He will not fail them. In New testament language we read, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us: If we believe not, yet HE ABIDETH FAITHFUL: He cannot deny Himself (2Tim. 2:12-13).

Perhaps God has given you a work to do and you feel yourself to be utterly inadequate for the task? "He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work..." (1Chron. 28:20). Whether we are called to a path of service or to a path of suffering, HE WILL NOT FAIL.

His Provision Faileth Not

In 1Kings 17, the prophet Elijah asks a strange thing of a widow woman. He finds her at "wits end corner". Between her child and herself, and starvation, was a handful of meal and a little oil. The prophet said, "Make me thereof a little cake first" (v13). It sounded selfish, but it was only a test for her faith, and, accompanying the request was the promise, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth" (v14).

Elijah had already proved God himself. In the day of sore famine God had said "I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there" (v4). It all seemed so contrary to nature, but God's provision did not fail. Elijah drank of the brook and ate the bread and flesh which were brought to him on raven's wing. But the continued drought finally dried up the brook. Yes, the brook failed, but the provision did not. The Lord merely changed the channel of supply – "Get thee to Zarephath ... I have commanded a widow woman

there to sustain thee” (v9). Elijah proved to be a wonderful “boarder” for the provision failed not all through the famine, meeting the need of the widow, her son and Elijah.

For all our spiritual needs, God has given to us an unfailing supply in His Holy Spirit (the oil) and in His precious Word (the meal). To the Philippians also, who had ministered to Paul’s needs, the apostle gave the promise, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

His Compassions Fail Not

It was God’s mercy and compassion that first saved us, but what compassion God has shown, amid all our failures and frailties, from conversion’s day until now!

Jeremiah wrote long ago, “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22,23). All the many mercies we receive come to us from the Throne of grace and from the hands of our great High Priest Who “ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Then also, there is the mercy of forgiveness which we continually require for sins, whether of thought, word of deed, and which we receive through our “Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1John 2:1). Well might we sing,

“I own myself the Saviour’s prize,
Mercy from first to last.”

His Promises Fail Not

How many “Exceeding great and precious promises” God has given to His people upon which, in an era of great uncertainty, one can rest in perfect peace. No matter what crisis may arise in the affairs of the world or in our personal lives, “there is no panic in the heart of God,” and if we rest upon the Word of God there need not be in ours.

What a noble testimony Joshua gave on his last day at the age of one hundred and ten years – “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that *not one thing hath failed* of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (Josh. 23:14). Like the old lady, who when she had personally experienced the faithfulness of God in carrying out some promise of the Word, would write in the margin of her Bible “T.P.”. So Joshua wrote over all God’s promises concerning Israel, “Tried and Proved”. How many other things have failed the child of God. Job said, “My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me” (Job 19:14). Again we read, “Money failed” (Gen. 47:15), “My strength faileth me” (Psalm 38:10), “My heart faileth me” (Psalm 40:12), “Refuge failed me” (Psalm 142:4). But never, never has anyone ever been able to say truthfully, “I trusted in God’s promise, and the promise failed me”.

“When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.”

Since such a God is ours, Whose Person, Provision, Compassions and Promises are so unfailing, “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?” (2Pet. 3:11). What confidence all this should beget in our hearts! How it should encourage us to serve more unwearingly and give more wholeheartedly to our Lord and Master, knowing that if we do so there awaits us by and by “A treasure in Heaven that faileth not.”

“Why should I ever careful be,
Since such a God is mine,
He watches o’er me, night and day,
And tells me, Mine is thine.”

If you are keeping the body under, you will find it to be the very servant it ought to be. But if you are allowing the body to have whatever it wants, truly you will find it to be the most tyrannical of masters.

* * * *

Let us be delivered from that please-everybody principle which so fails continually of its purpose, and like the hypocrite, seems to be out of favour with both heaven and earth.

* * * *

If you reach a point where you are not sure which way to turn, the only safe course is to *wait on God*.

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“PAUL’S METAPHORS”

This is the last and 14th Paper on the metaphors of the Apostle Paul to illustrate some of the profound doctrinal truths which are taught in the Pauline Epistles. In this series we have considered the practical applications of these truths to the believer’s life as follows:

1. ARCHITECTURE : Types of Building
2. AGRICULTURE : Aspects of Labour in the Field
3. ATHLETICS : Steadfastness in the Race
4. ARMY : Essentials in the Warfare
5. ANATOMY : Proper use of the believer’s body
6. AMBASSADOR : Dignity of the Ministry
7. ATTIRE : Clothes to be put off and put on
8. ACCOUNTANCY : Profit and Loss in the believer’s life
9. ASTRONOMY : The Glory of the Celestial
10. ANIMALS : Dangers for the Flock
11. ADOPTION : Blessing of Sonship
12. APPETITE : Essential Nourishment
13. ADMINISTRATION : Order in the Household
14. ALTAR : Sacrifice for Christ

(14) ALTAR : THE SACRIFICE

A familiar aspect of Jewish life and heathen Gentile religious custom in Paul’s day, was associated with the altar. Paul uses this background to teach as follows.

SEPARATION

“Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” (1Cor. 10:18). To be a partaker means to participate, or to share with. The background of this teaching is the O.T. peace offering when there were portions for God, the priests and the offerer. Paul uses this O.T. illustration to distinguish partaking of the Lord’s Table and partaking of the table of devils. The idol is nothing, but the devils behind it are real. To partake of a feast dedicated to a heathen god is to have fellowship with the demons.

SUPPORT

“They which minister about holy things live (feed) of the things of the temple and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar” (1Cor. 9:13). The Levites which served at the altar in the tabernacle were permitted to take a portion for themselves. “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the gospel” (1Cor. 9:14).

SACRIFICE

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present (yield) your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Romans is the first Epistle in the order of reading the N.T. The spiritual lesson is illustrated from the offering of approach at the brazen altar in the court of the tabernacle. This living sacrifice is reasonable, logical, considered judgement which rationally corresponds to the claims of the Gospel. Our response at salvation is to stand ready at the altar to present our bodies once for all, a decisive action with ongoing results. This is not a crisis of dedication but is priestly and permanently the characteristic of our lives from conversion.

The tender mercies of God appeal, not by impelling force, to us to willingly surrender our bodies (once vehicles and instruments of fleshly lusts) to God’s disposal for a priestly offering. God has bestowed power through the indwelling Holy Spirit for such a sacrifice. This is not just the least we can do. Nor is this mere ceremonial sacrifice but the offering is purposely and intelligently rendered as having no will of our own, that we may prove God’s will (v2). We stand ready at the altar to do whatever is His will. This sacrifice is not spasmodic, occasional or sentimental. “And be not conformed (pressed into the mould of) 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). This new way of sober thinking, does not have the present age as its model. It marks the priority of an inner spiritual life in accordance with Divine Guidance, in dependence upon God.

Paul, in his last written words, speaks of himself as a drink offering poured out upon the altar. “I am now ready to be offered (already being poured out), and the time of my departure is at hand (hath arrived)” (2Tim. 4:6). The metaphor is the drink offering poured out upon the lamb just before it was burnt on the altar. “Yea, and if I be offered (poured forth) upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all” (Phil. 2:17). Paul was willing to pour out his life as an oblation upon the altar.

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Presenting the Message

“Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2Timothy 4:2)

Preaching is not just the performance of a single hour. Sometimes it is the pouring out of the preacher’s life. Often it takes a lifetime to make a sermon. A true sermon is the essence of the life of the preacher himself.

There once lived a Christian in London, England. He visited two 'churches'. In the morning he went to City Temple. There in the heart of the great metropolis, he listened to one of the most eloquent sermons he had ever listened, and as he came out he was heard to exclaim, "*What a wonderful sermon!*" On that night, he went to the Metropolitan Tabernacle, that great auditorium with its two huge galleries with the pulpit made famous by Charles H. Spurgeon, that prince of preachers. As he came out, revived and refreshed he exclaimed, "*What a wonderful Christ!*"

We are not expected of God to preach great sermons. If you are entertaining such a desire, it is better to give it up. This sin-stricken world does not need sermons but it needs a message; there is an immense difference between a *sermon* and a *message* and a servant of God should be able to distinguish between them.

One can go to a Bible School or Seminary and be trained on how to preach a good sermon, but you will have to go to God, to get a message from Him. The people we desire to serve are looking for what God can give. Sermons will never influence men, but messages will. Appealing sermons will never convert men, but a God-given message will. Sermons appeal to the intellect, but messages to the heart. What men need today is not a good treat for their mind, but a message that will soothe their hearts. We must go out to present Christ, the loving and living Saviour, the Friend of sinners.

The importance of this chapter cannot be over-emphasized. Unless our message is from God, we beat the air, and unless it is presented in an interesting manner, we shall soon find ourselves speaking to empty benches, or if in the open air to none but loiterers and children. Once a crowd gathers we must endeavour to so present the message that will hold them till the end. This is indeed a great art. We must seek the Lord's guidance for this. "He that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, *shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing*, and increase the fruits of your righteousness – R.V." (2Cor. 9:10). When seeking a suitable message, God's promise has to be claimed and God has proved His faithfulness time and again. At the same time we must remember that God expects us to work hard to *study* (see 1Tim. 4:13-16), and so far as it is possible, to fit and qualify ourselves for the work to which we are called. We trust that the following may prove very helpful to many who are labouring in the vineyard.

We would say, let the preacher *pray more*. It is well said, "Prayer makes our preaching strong, gives it unction and makes it stick. The character of our praying will determine the character of our preaching." So shall we be praying preachers. The prayer ingredient in the preacher's life, while in his study and in his pulpit, will bring a colourful and fragrant result.

Let preachers *study more*, and give the people more variety, and they will obtain better congregations. When people know that they will hear truths that they have heard a thousand times before in almost precisely the same language, it is not to be wondered that they may not flock to listen or may lose interest.

Aiming Our Message

The importance of having a clear object in sermon making is splendidly illustrated by the renowned preacher Henry Wart Beecher, "He once likened a number of preachers, himself among them, in his first two years of experience, to be sportsmen who fired their guns without taking aim. At last he learnt the necessity of *aiming* before firing, by studying how it was the apostles succeeded in winning souls through their preaching." He says: "And I studied the sermons in the book of Acts until I got this idea: that the apostles were accustomed first to feel for a ground on which the people and they stood together; *a common ground* where they could meet. Then they heaped up a large number of the particulars of knowledge that belonged to their hearers; and when they had got that knowledge which everybody would agree to, they arranged them in a proper form in their minds. Then they preached it out to their hearers with all earnestness and feeling. That was the first definite idea of taking aim that I had in my mind.

'Now', said I, 'I will make a sermon just like that'. I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. First I drew up a sketch of the things we all know. 'You all know we are living in a world fast perishing. You all know that we live in uncertain times: that you cannot tell whether you will live another day ...,' and in that way I went

on with my 'you all know' until I had about forty of them. When I got through that, I turned around and made it plain upon them with all my might: and there were seventeen men awakened under that sermon. I never felt so triumphant in my life. I cried all the way home. I said to myself, 'Now I know how to preach'."

Content of Our Message

Mr F. Cockram, an Open-Air preacher in England, puts it in a nutshell:

"What our fallen sinful nature is, how it merits death and our sinful actions are to be judged of God; what the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us; and how its unspeakable benefits become ours by faith; that the new life ever follows after the new birth, and that his newness of life is wrought within us by the power of God's Holy Spirit; that the hearer of the message is responsible for its acceptance or rejection; we shall deal around these great truths, *so simple* that a child may understand them, *so profound* that heaven looks wonderfully upon them. Our preaching must gather around them."

"*Proverbs* should be used chiefly at the *commencement* to enliven the address; *quotations* from sacred books will be more suitable in the *middle*; the *conclusions* should be characterized by increased solemnity, when *Scripture passages* and *direct appeals* to the conscience are most appropriate."

The following are some of the qualifications of a 'minister' from Martin Luther's list:

" He should be able to teach plainly and in order.

He should know when to stop.

He should be sure of what he means to say.

He should be ready to stake body and soul, goods and reputation, on its truth.

He should study diligently. "

In open-air work, it is important that your address has *many points* and that they are presented short and sweet. Do not just mention one point at the very close, for many will not wait to the end. It is a mistake to have a long story with just one application at the end.

Speak as long as the Spirit carries you and as long as you are holding the people. You must be able to feel the pulse of the audience. If there is anyone else to speak after you, do not hesitate to stop speaking even before the message is fully over, if you are not holding the attention of the people. Stand up to be seen. Speak up to be heard. Shut up to be appreciated!

Never try to be funny. Dramatic narration of jokes in bad taste or long stories should be avoided. We are not called to act on the stage. We do not find a record of any jokes presented either by our Lord or by the apostles in the New Testament. People will laugh at your jokes, but will never cry at your preaching. Remember your calling is the highest and noblest one and you are accountable to the Lord.

Jotting Down Notes

We would strongly recommend every worker to maintain a notebook divided up into sections such as: New Illustrations, Thoughts for Address, Skeleton Sermons, Expressive and colourful sayings, Scraps of Poetry and Difficulties Raised by the People etc. I have done this myself and have found it most helpful and handy.

Without a notebook of this kind we may forget many a happy thought on which we could build a useful address or miss a good wayside illustration.

Missionary Archibald Naismith, teacher, headmaster and preacher, was in charge of a High School at Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, India, for nearly half a century, to the blessing of thousands of students and others. He has also authored several short commentaries in Telugu and has prepared a Concordance of proper names for the Telugu Bible. His oral ministry in various parts of India and Malaysia was greatly blessed of God and he is reputed for preaching in a most effective way. His sermons were presented beautifully with apt quotes and graphic illustrations. He was an artist with words. In his 45 years of

experience, he has collected quotations and illustrations, many out of his own experiences, which he published in **two** volumes. Their usefulness is beyond description. We would heartily recommend every preacher to possess these two volumes **“1200 Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes”** as well as his third volume **“1200 Scripture Outlines”**.

If we keep our eyes and minds open, we shall see something almost every day that will be useful to illustrate scripture truths. It is good to note them down as points while studying or in your observation.

True Preparation

The three essentials to be followed by every preacher of the word of God are:

1. Seek the Mind of God.
2. Search the Word of God.
3. Speak the Truth of God.

How vital these are!

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Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2Timothy 2:15)

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The Death of Christ Vindicates God’s Righteousness

The apostle Paul in Romans chapter 3 speaks of “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (verses 24-26). The death of Christ, the shedding of His blood, has vindicated God in His dealings with men of past ages, and has enabled Him at the present time to impute righteousness to the ungodly consistently with His own righteous character. If “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4), how could God say of one who brought such a sacrifice, “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him”, or concerning “his sin that he hath committed ... it shall be forgiven him” (Leviticus 1:4; 4:35)?

Many would not hesitate to say that if God is sovereign, He can surely forgive those who trespass against Him as He pleases, but this ignores entirely the claims of essential justice. God cannot, because of His inherent perfection, act arbitrarily or unjustly, and for this we should be eternally grateful. For a God who could be unjust could never be trusted. If no basis of moral rectitude underlies, as an unshakeable foundation, all His ways, there is no knowing what He might do. As the Psalmist has so clearly stated; “The LORD is upright: He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalm 92:15).

The truth is that the sins of those who lived in ages past, and who approached God in faith by such means as He ordained, were pre-remitted i.e. remitted on account as it were. The sinner was forgiven, but his sin was recorded against One who was to come and answer for it. The forbearance of God was demonstrated, but His righteousness in so acting was not demonstrated until Christ came and offered that perfect sacrifice in virtue of which God in His foreknowledge had been “passing over ... the sins done aforetime” (R.V.). In this way Christ cleared God of every possible charge of belittling the guilt of sin, or of disregarding its just penalty. In His infinite sacrifice He has vindicated the throne of God by discovering the basis of perfect righteousness upon which His forbearance had granted forgiveness to men in former times.

But His righteousness, too, in moving out to mankind presently, in their “being justified freely by His grace”, is revealed. The Justifier must be just; for how can He impute righteousness to another, if in so doing He compromises and violates His own? In the sacrifice of Christ we see the means whereby God can “be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus”. The uniqueness of that sacrifice is that its virtue is not merely symbolic, it is real. His blood does not only cleanse ceremonially, as with the sacrifices of old; it cleanses actually, perfecting for ever them that are sanctified.

If God is to meet our need as sinners, He must be “*just to forgive us our sins*” (1John 1:9), for “the LORD our God is righteous in *all* His works which He doeth” (Daniel 9:14). “Gracious is the LORD – and righteous” (Psalm 116:5). He must be “a just God – and a Saviour” (Isaiah 45:21). If the grace of God is to reign unto eternal life, it must do so “through righteousness”, and this may be only “in Jesus Christ our Lord”, and by His ‘one act of righteousness’, His obedience unto death (Romans 5:21).

“The righteous LORD loveth righteousness” (Psalm 11:7). He is righteous in His character, His judgments, His works, and His ways (Psalm 119:137; 145:17). His righteousness is eternally inviolable (Psalm 111:3; 119:142). The Almighty doth not pervert justice, because justice resides in Him (Job 8:3; Jeremiah 50:7). The words of Moses truly “distil as the dew”, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Nowhere is this fact more clearly declared than at Calvary. Although God’s beloved Son bore the stroke of offended justice, not one iota was withheld of all that was due (Psalm 42:7; 88:7; Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29; Romans 8:32). Without partiality God’s inflexible justice demanded and received absolute satisfaction. Those who ponder the sufferings of Christ, and who enter into something of the meaning of His being forsaken and afflicted of God, will “declare *His righteousness* unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this” (Psalm 22:31). The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is shown to be a “righteous Father” (John 17:25).

And now this righteousness of God, eternal as God Himself, because essential to His nature, but declared as never before in the death of His Son, is the solid ground of the Christian’s faith (2Peter 1:1 R.V.; 1Peter 2:23), the spring of his joy (Psalm 145:7) and the theme of his adoring praise. We have here, however, a matter of profound practical import which deserves to be looked at closely. Although God was necessarily righteous in “the passing over of the sins done aforetime”, this righteousness was not apparent because the basis of it was not yet revealed. Not until Christ came and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself was the ground revealed upon which God had been bestowing forgiveness throughout the long ages of the past. Man was given no explanation of the ways of God, and nothing to rest upon save the bare word of divine promise (if we may so speak).

There is a strange idea at times, that the men of those earlier ages were less intelligent, and less prone to rational thinking than ourselves, just because they knew nothing of the advanced technology of our times. Although science, in the very limited modern sense of the term, was little appreciated by them, and some of their ideas as a consequence seem naive to us, the profundities and subtleties of some of those ancient philosophers, for example, have possibly remained unsurpassed throughout later times. Certainly it would have been no less a conundrum to them than it would be to us, to think that an animal’s death could atone for human sin. We would even venture to suggest that with so much less of comparative triviality to occupy them, the men of that day would ponder these deep moral and spiritual mysteries far more than do the

shallow, distracted minds of men and women today. We have only to go back a few centuries in the history of England to recall days when plough boys and housemaids could, and did, discuss intelligently such matters as predestination and propitiation. How few can today!

With the salvation of their precious souls, their relationship to Jehovah the Living God, and their eternal welfare at stake, can we think that none ever pondered these things? Could any serious-minded man or woman see how the blood of a beast could cleanse the sin of an intelligent, responsible, moral agent such as man? We know that the animal sacrifices merely covered the sins for which they were offered, and that sin was not put away until Christ died; but *they* did not know that. As far as we are aware no explanation of the mystery was given to ease the doubts and difficulties of active, anxious minds. If God said He would forgive sin on this ground, then that was expected to be sufficient, and men, even the most profound thinkers, were granted no concessions for moral and intellectual difficulties.

In a general way they believed that when Messiah came He would “untie all knots”, but they were obliged to leave the knots alone until then. By no amount of unpicking could they loosen them themselves.

But now ponder this for a moment! If all those saints of ages past were expected to trust God unquestioningly in the most important matter of all, the forgiveness of their sins, how can we complain if we are required to tread a pathway in life for which we can see no good reason? God is not obliged to give account of any of His matters (Job 33:13), and oftentimes He requires us to accept His word, and to *believe that*, even when we cannot *understand how*. The matter is one of confidence in Him. Certainly it is not easy to accept something that we cannot understand, but if every matter could be reasoned out, faith would be but little required. Are we prepared to believe His word when there is nothing to support it, and everything seems against it? Are we willing to trust Him, though we cannot understand His ways (Isaiah 50:10,11)? Do we believe that even when “clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne” (Psalm 97:2 – R.V.)? The cross of Christ declares that even when no righteous basis for God’s actions has been revealed, such a basis must exist.

The ways of God are always right, even when our finite minds cannot discover the reason for, nor the basis of, His operations. That we can safely trust Him to act always and only in righteousness, that we can contentedly believe that “His way is perfect”, may be learned from the faith of the oft-despised Old Testament saints, and its perfect vindication in the sacrifice of Christ. They accepted the ceremonial way of divine forgiveness, though its inadequacy must have been so obvious, and no satisfactory basis of justice was apparent. They did not doubt the righteousness of God, though they could not discover it. Faith triumphed over ignorance and doubt, and rested squarely upon the word of God and the character of God.

How few of us, to our shame be it said, rise in our worship so joyously, so confidently, and so intelligently to the heights reached in the following extracts from Israel’s own song book.

“I will praise the LORD according to His righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High” (Psalm 7:17).

“And my tongue shall speak of Thy righteousness and of Thy praise all the day long” (Psalm 35:28).

“O God, Thou God of my salvation... my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness. O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth Thy praise” (Psalm 51:14,15).

“Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who hast done great things: O God, who is like unto Thee?” (Psalm 71:19).

“O sing unto the LORD a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory. The LORD hath made known His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly shewed in the sight of the heathen” (Psalm 98:1,2).

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The Fruit of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit

There is one God (1Tim. 2:5) but a plurality of persons in the Godhead – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person (John 14:16,17; 15:26; 16:7-15) and we must always remember His Deity and distinct Personality.

The Holy Spirit is first mentioned in Genesis 1:2 in connection with creation. We read, “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”. In the Old Testament the Spirit came upon men to empower them to perform certain specific services for God (Exod. 31:3-5; Judges 14:6; 2Sam. 23:2; 1Chron. 28:12). He inspired men to prophesy and write the Scriptures (2Tim. 3:16; 1Pet. 1:11; 2Pet. 1:21). The Spirit filled Elizabeth and Zacharias (Luke 1:41,67) and John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15).

The Lord Jesus Christ was born as a result of the working of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35) and when He was baptized the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove (Matt. 3:16; John 1:32,33). The Holy Spirit anointed the Lord to preach the Gospel (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 60:1; Luke 4:18,19) and God gave the Spirit to Him without limit (John 3:34).

We read in Acts 2:1,2 that “they were all with one accord in one place” and the Holy Spirit “filled all the house where they were sitting”. Those present were immersed in the Holy Spirit: it was the baptism in the Spirit. This Baptism at Pentecost was a once only occurrence, with the aim of forming the Body of Christ, that is, the Church. The disciples were each of them gifted for the service of God (v3). Each one was “filled with the Holy Ghost” (v4). The whole church, that is all believers, is seen as having been baptized in the Spirit at Pentecost, as we read in 1Corinthians 12:13, “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body”.

All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment they are saved. In 1Corinthians 6:19 we read “your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own”. Being indwelt by the Spirit is not the same as being filled with the Spirit (Acts 4:31; Eph. 5:18). Whereas all believers are permanently *indwelt* by the Spirit, a believer will only be *filled* with the Spirit when completely obedient and yielded to the revealed will of God. The believer will then respond in absolute and complete obedience and submission to the will of God. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers for the Lord’s service. He guides empowers and enables believers (Luke 2:27; Acts 1:8; 2:4; 16:6,7; 1Cor. 2:4). As well as dwelling in each individual believer the Spirit dwells in the local assembly (1Cor. 3:16,17).

The fruit of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit works to gradually change a believer so that he becomes more and more like the Lord Jesus. The Spirit seeks to control the life of a believer so that He can reproduce in him something of the beauties of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ who always did what was pleasing to God His Father (John 8:29).

The life of a tree flows into the branches and the branches naturally bear fruit. The kind of fruit a tree produces depends on the nature of the tree, and in John 15:1-8, the Lord speaks of Himself as “the true vine”. He wants each branch, that is, each believer, to bear “much fruit”. To do this, a believer must “abide” in Christ. To “abide” in Christ and become more like Him, a believer must stay in contact with Christ and grow spiritually through prayer, reading and meditating on the Word of God and obeying the truths revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. As a branch draws strength from the vine so a believer draws spiritual strength from Christ.

The fruit a believer is to bear is the fruit produced by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This fruit is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22,23). Love, joy and

peace could be regarded as graces and qualities which are particularly relevant to, and a result of the believer's relationship with God; longsuffering, gentleness and goodness as concerned with the believer's relationship with other people; and faith, meekness and temperance as graces and qualities which are concerned with the disciplined life of the believer.

The Spirit works within us so that we might become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). The word "fruit" is singular, and the nine qualities listed in Galatians 5:22,23 are a unity. They were always seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. These qualities, graces and characteristics which the Holy Spirit works to produce in our lives are the nine-fold fruit of the Spirit. That fruit is likeness to Christ and "against such there is no law" (v23). If these qualities were fully present then the Law would be fulfilled.

Love

Love is a wonderful thing. It is the greatest virtue (1Cor. 13:13). Love permeates, pervades and binds together all the other virtues and graces. God is love (1John 4:8,16). God is eternal and therefore love is eternal. The source and cause of God's love is in Himself, and God proved His love for us by the fact that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Believers are the children of God (Gal. 3:26-28; Rom. 8:16) and are a new creation (2Cor. 5:17). They love God and other believers, and are enabled by the Holy Spirit to do that which is righteous. Loving God, keeping His commandments and loving other believers is evidence that a believer is a child of God and has the life of God within him (1John 3:10; 5:2; John 13:35).

God loved the world (John 3:16). At Calvary Christ showed His love for God, for He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). He "loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25) and each believer can say, "the Son of God ... loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The "love of Christ ... passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). The love of the Spirit is mentioned in Romans 15:30 and "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

Believers, being the children of God, should love other believers and show in practical ways, the love they feel (1Pet. 4:8). If love to God, to other believers and to those who have not been saved is present in a believer's life then all the other virtues will be present also (1Cor. 13).

Believers are to love one another (1Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 1John 4:7-11). The Lord said "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34,35). We are to "love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1John 4:7). The reality of our love is shown ultimately by deeds, and we read, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1John 3:16).

Love manifests itself in many ways. The one who loves wants that which is truly best for the person loved; wants to give something which will bring true and lasting pleasure, and wants to be with the person loved. Love is the greatest motivating and controlling force. The Lord said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Love will cause us to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:24).

We are to love with a love which is unfeigned and fervent (1Pet. 1:22), without dissimulation (Rom. 12:9), "in deed and in truth" (1John 3:18), and are to "abound in love one toward another, and toward all men" (1Thess. 3:12). True love is unselfish, does not bear grudges, is kind, gives without looking for a return, is not boastful or proud, does not envy and perseveres (1Cor. 13).

Believers are to love God and each other (Mark 12:30,31; John 15:17). Obedience to God is evidence of loving God (John 14:15) and "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. 5:14). The love we show to fellow-believers will reveal our love for God (1John 4:11,12; 5:1), our nearness to God and how we have learned of Him by meditating on the Word of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to control our lives so that we are gradually being conformed more and more to the Lord Jesus Christ. God loves us and wants us to be with Him, and the Lord is coming back to take all believers to be with Himself for ever (1Thess. 4:15-17; 1Cor. 15:52).

As the Holy Spirit produces fruit in a believer, the believer will stop being self-centred and will experience increasing love for God, for other believers and for those who have not been saved. Until the believer is taken home to be with the Lord forever, he will seek to serve God and help other believers, and will endeavour to make known to the lost around him, the love of God and the way of salvation by grace, through faith in the finished work on the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joy

God experiences joy and He is the source of all true lasting joy. We read in Zephaniah 3:17, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing”. The Lord “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2) and “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10). The Lord wants us to experience joy. He said to His disciples, “These things I have spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

The abiding joy experienced by believers is a marvellous testimony to those to whom they seek to witness. The deep lasting joy of believers is produced by the Holy Spirit who indwells each believer (1Cor. 6:19). True joy comes as a result of believing and receiving God’s gift of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8).

Paul prayed for the Roman believers that God would fill them “with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:13). Joy results from studying and meditating on the Word of God, under the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeking to obey its precepts. We can, however, grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) by sinning and then we will lose the joy of our salvation (Ps. 51:12).

Believer’s names are written in heaven and this is a cause of great rejoicing (Luke 10:20). We are told to “Rejoice in the Lord alway” (Phil. 4:4) and to “Rejoice evermore” (1Thess. 5:16). In heaven there is “fulness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11). Although believers have not seen the Lord Jesus Christ they love Him and “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1Pet. 1:8).

Peace

The Holy Spirit led and inspired Paul to write to the believers in Rome “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). When He was on the cross the Lord’s precious blood was shed (1Pet. 1:19) and “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1John 1:7). He “made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20) and believers who, at one time, were enemies of God (Rom. 5:10) now have peace with God and nothing can destroy that eternal peace with Him. God is the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33; Phil. 4:9; 1Thess. 5:23) and He will “bless His people with peace” (Ps. 29:11). The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6) and as the “Lord of peace” (2Thess. 3:16). The Lord spoke to His disciples of “My joy” (John 15:11) and in John 14:27, of “My peace” when He said to them, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Peace *with* God cannot be lost, but the peace *of* God “which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7) can be lost. Those of us who are believers can lose the peace of God through allowing sin to enter our lives. Righteousness and peace always go together (Isa. 32:17; Jam. 3:18) and when the Lord was crucified “righteousness and peace ... kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10). Peace follows righteousness. If we fail to trust God, do not study and meditate on His Word, or if we disobey His revealed will and neglect prayer then we will lose the peace of God. If this should happen our fellowship and communion with Him are broken, we backslide, lose the joy of our salvation (Ps. 51:12) and our service for Him will be hindered.

However, God is gracious, merciful and longsuffering and we can enjoy the peace of God again if and when we repent and turn to God, for, “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1John 1:9). Believers can enjoy, as a present reality both peace *with* God, and the peace *of* God. There is peace to be found in meditating on the Word of God (Ps. 119:165) and in obeying God (Phil. 4:9).

We are encouraged to “live in peace” (2Cor. 13:11), to live peaceably with all men (Heb. 12:14; Rom. 12:18), and to be at peace among ourselves (1Thess. 5:13). We should be “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) and should do the things that make for peace (Rom. 14:19).

To be “spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6) and we should let the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). The risen Lord appeared to His frightened disciples and said “Peace be unto you” (John 20:19,21,26). Those who maintain communion with God and trust Him fully can say, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, LORD, only maketh me dwell in safety” (Ps. 4:8). In Isaiah 26:3, we have the assurance and the promise that “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.”

(To be continued D.V.)

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Help for Young Believers

The Veterans Advise – No 2

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

“Ye know what manner of men we were among you” (1Thess. 1:5)

It is of the utmost importance that the preacher should be a man of sterling character. Character is not built in a day. Reputation is what people think a person is, but character is what he really IS. If the heart is not true, if the truths we preach are not sincerely believed by us and if we are not really seeking God’s glory but our own, if we have some ulterior motive in our preaching, our God will surely expose us. God cannot accept unreality. He is truth, and He must have truth and uprightness in all those who profess to represent Him.

There is special need for the servant to search his own heart, lest he preach to others that which is not a living reality in his own soul. Have you never been guilty of hypocrisy, dear brother? I have.

The Holy Spirit’s exhortations to Timothy and Titus regarding sobriety were definitely intended for their profit, and for ours. Every Christian should be a happy soul. A churlish, grouchy preacher is a dishonour to God; all jesting and frivolous talk is unbecoming and is condemned in Scripture (Eph. 5:4). How can we hope to be taken seriously when we preach, if we seem lacking in seriousness at other times? Others may seem to enjoy your clever jokes, but will they be edified thereby, and will they obtain any profit when later you preach to them?

Some, who might have been used of God, have ruined their usefulness by foolish behaviour with those of the opposite sex. “Marriage is honourable in all”, and the Lord’s servant is free to lead about a wife. If the step is taken “in the Lord”, it may add greatly to the weight of his messages to both believer and unbeliever. But imprudence in the preacher’s behaviour with women may end his usefulness to God and create a blot on his testimony, with lasting consequence as to his future service. In fact, the writer questions, in view of Proverbs 6:33, whether a preacher who has been proven guilty of adultery should ever again be commended to the work of the Lord.

One thing that hinders the acceptance of the full-time preacher’s message is the thought present with some that his preaching is a mere profession. To offset this in part, preachers, especially young men, should be ready to perform any manual labour which would help others: perhaps the people whose hospitality he

partakes of, or someone he hopes to get out to his meetings (Acts 20:34,35; 1Cor. 4:12). How often a farmer has excused himself from attending, because he was pressed with work, but he has been ashamed to produce another excuse when the preacher has helped him with his harvest. Far be it from any of us to imagine that by making ourselves useful, we would thereby lose the esteem of the people, or belittle our profession, for our preaching should never be considered a profession, but a passion.

Too often it is felt that the preacher has chosen his calling because of a dislike for toil. Surely it should be possible to give the lie to this theory, by a readiness to work, as is clearly seen in Paul's example when among the saints at Thessalonica (1Thess. 2:9-12; 2Thess. 3:6-9). No one should be at financial advantage by leaving his daily toil to serve the Lord full-time. If his service costs nothing, it is worth nothing.

At present, as in the past, there are those who are willingly "enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ". In contrast to hardness, some young men are found moving around assemblies, where kind hearted Christians provide comfortable beds and good meals; or constantly attending conferences where the same things are freely given. They seem to have but slight desire, evidently, to pioneer in new places, where they could enjoy the much greater luxury of spending their last cent in getting the Gospel to sinners, and of having to pray earnestly for another pair of shoes, because he had worn his out tramping the Gospel around the country. Is there not in some cases even the thought that since their home assembly gave them a letter of commendation, therefore they, and other such assemblies, owe them a living. Is yours a profession, or a passion?

You may say a preacher would starve if he left the beaten path for an out-of-the-way part. Have you even known of any such who have starved? And, if you starved in thus spreading the Gospel, would it not be an honourable death? Good men ever since Pentecost have dared to strike out with the Gospel, counting on no one but God. Is He not the God of our day, as well as of the days of Elijah and of the apostles? Or, do we lack the character and faith of our forebears? Is it not we who are different? Shame on us if we would urge others to trust in God's promises and not trust Him ourselves.

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Seven Faithful Ones

God is FAITHFUL (1Cor. 1:9)
Christ is FAITHFUL (Rev. 19:11)
Abraham was FAITHFUL (Gal. 3:9)
Moses was FAITHFUL (Num. 12:7)
Daniel was FAITHFUL (Dan. 6:4)
Paul was FAITHFUL (1Tim. 1:12)
Timothy was FAITHFUL (1Cor. 4:17)

"Be thou FAITHFUL"

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Questions and Answers

Question: “O wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24). Who is this man?

Answer: This is a believer seeking practical sanctification in his own strength. Ch 7 answers the question raised in Ch 6. “For ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then, shall we sin, because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid” (Rom. 6:14-15). The law neither means sanctification or rule of life. Freedom from the law is necessary and beneficial; to bring forth “fruit unto holiness” (Rom. 6:22). In Ch 6 by death, we are “free from sin” (3 times – vv. 7,18,22). In Ch 7 we are, “loosed from the law” (3 times – vv. 2,3,6), being dead.

Sin and law have not died, but we as believers have died to them. Paul uses the metaphor of slavery in Ch 6 and marriage in Ch 7. We have been freed from one master to willingly serve another (Rom. 6:22). We have died to one very demanding husband and are; “married to Another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4).

The “wretched man” is not an ordinary unsaved man under law since he would do good sometime (7:15 is habitual practice). The “wretched man” is not normal Christian experience or an interim period after salvation. The personal pronouns, “I, me, myself” occur 47 times in the verses of Ch 7. He is experiencing this perpetual feud, inward conflict and defeat as he searches for deliverance in himself.

This man has a new nature, a desire to do what is right and needs a new power which is found in “Jesus Christ” (Rom. 7:25) through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:2). He has learned, not his guilt but his helplessness. His cry is not for justification but for deliverance. He is imprisoned in the flesh where the law of sin and death reigns. The flesh has not changed but the delivered believer is now a bond servant of “the law of God,” through the risen Lord Jesus Christ and the present power of the Holy Spirit.

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How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him ...? (Hebrews 2:3,4)

Many individuals understandably place significant value upon their physical and mental wellbeing during the course of their lives. Yet the majority of individuals, who will inhabit the Earth at some point in time, just live and die without giving thought to, or are misguided, regarding that aspect of their being which carries the most weight and will determine their eternal destiny.

This aspect is addressed in the above quotation from the Bible and is linked to the most significant of escapes that any individual could ever experience. It concerns that salvation from God’s future judgment upon sin and the terrors of the Lake of Fire, in all its fullness of continual torment and damnation, that foreboding place of “*outer darkness ... weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 25:30), “*where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*” (Mark 9:48). While solemnly there is absolutely no hope of any being, spirit or human, escaping out of this place, mercifully, there certainly is opportunity for us to escape from being cast into it.

How shall we escape if we neglect

The question answers itself! There will be no possibility of escape or deliverance whatsoever for those who neglect, fail to grasp hold of and make good to themselves that great provision that God has determined to

save a sinner from Hell. How dreadful for anyone to find themselves cast out into a place like this, and yet that will be our experience if we despise or ignore the escape that God offers. Mankind foolishly jests and makes light of Hell and adds to his sins by caricaturing (making fun of) and belittling the devil, the master artificer of deceit and delusion, not realising his power and grip upon them until it is too late!

So great salvation

We only need to consider some of the aspects of this “so great salvation” to discover why even careless neglect is so serious:

- a) Because of that from which we need to be delivered. The full or hectic, yet few and quickly passing years of our life on earth are insignificant compared to the endless and futile solitude we will face in that terrifying place already described.
- b) Because of the scope and the greatness of God’s love shown towards us, and the cost to Him and His beloved Son to provide this salvation: **“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). His death upon the cross culminated in His glorious bodily resurrection proving His great victory over death, sin, the grave and the cruel devil himself. The Bible is full of this great work in its prophetic utterances, recordings of the events in the Gospel accounts and explanation of the judicial aspects in the later epistles.
- c) Because of the significant and immeasurable spiritual and eternal blessings received by those who embrace it; those who confess and turn from their sinful ways, submitting to the ways of God and believing wholeheartedly in the work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross as totally sufficient to make them acceptable to God. Those at peace with God, no longer fear His wrath, are forgiven and become recipients of His holy Spirit as a guarantee of those future blessings described as **“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”** (1Peter 1:4). They will suffer trials and afflictions on earth, but their ultimate safety is sure. They are safe in Christ.

Which at the first ...

Furthermore, the One who has guaranteed this so great salvation by His Own voluntary sacrifice on the cross was the One who first declared it. He who is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe which we inhabit, He who was manifest in the flesh as the incarnate, eternal Son of God, should be the One whose words our ears should first give attention to and obey. He preached, **“Repent ye, and believe the gospel”** (Mark 1:15). All one day will obey His voice when He calls the dead from the graves to judgment (John 5:24-29; Acts 17:30,31). All future judgment of the living and the dead has been committed to Him.

And was confirmed ...

The Biblical book of Acts records the testimony that was borne by those men who were eyewitnesses of the Lord’s life, death and resurrection, and the manner in which God so clearly worked with them in those early days, to confirm that they were indeed bearing witness to the truth: **“God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will”** (Hebrews 2:4). Those days are past but their witness is recorded to convince all that these timid, frightened men were truly quickened and empowered through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to bear a bold, sound and uncompromising testimony of all that God had accomplished in Him.

Thus with such evidence of a divine work undertaken, it is folly to ignore the reality of such a warning, whether we are atheistic, immoral or even somewhat religious. The Lord Jesus warned such individuals – **“How can ye escape the damnation of hell?”** (Matthew 23:33). The urgent word to those who were exhorted to flee from the destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is still vibrant and valid for us today: **“Escape for thy life”** (Genesis 19:17).

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