

The Old Paths – July / September : 2020 – № 27

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And Ezra opened the Book in the sight of all the people ... So they read in the Book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading ... And all the people went their way ... to make great mirth, because they had understood the Words that were declared unto them. (Nehemiah 8:5,8,12)



From the Editor’s Desk

“THE WORD OF GOD – A SHARP TWOEDGED SWORD”

**“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword”
(Hebrews 4:12)**

The context of Hebrews chapter 4 is entering into the rest prepared for the believer in Christ. This is not only the rest which God gives but the rest which God Himself enjoys in Christ – Hebrews 4:9-10. The great hindrance is unbelief. The warning of verse 11 is, “lest any man fall”, and so we are commended to the Word of God.

“The Word of God” is the discernor between reality or falsehood; it is the test of faith or unbelief. The Word of God is ...

“Quick” (Living); possessed of life, contrary to that which is dead, the Word like seed sown has life in itself.

“Powerful”; effectual, energetic, active, exposes weakness and enables.

“Sharper than any twoedged sword”; double edged; condemns – commends; rebukes – restores, it may

wound in order to heal, it may cut out what is unhealthy that healing may take place, it will divide the bad from the good, it will disapprove and it will approve.

“Piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit”. The Word of God penetrates deeply to distinguish; to divide the “soulish” (the carnal, material, emotion, formal part of man) and the “spiritual” (immaterial, affections, intents). God’s Word develops the spirit as the faculty to discern the unseen and eternal.

“And of the joints (external) and marrow (internal), and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”. The word cuts into the complexity of personality. It disentangles the thoughts (before they become words) and intents (before they become actions), and brings them into proper relationship.

The figure may be the sacrificial knife or the surgeon’s scalpel. The surgery may be very serious; a life or death issue but the removal of the malignant tumour of unbelief will be beneficial to the health and strength of our faith.

The last word of the verse would seem to indicate a “heart” condition. “It is a good thing that the heart be established with (confirmed by) Grace” (Heb. 13:9).

Ephesians 6 teaches that if we are to stand in the evil day we must; “Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Vigilance is needed in the spiritual conflict. “Salvation” gives courage against assault. The specific application of the “Word of God” by “the Spirit” will give appropriate defence in the battle.

“These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges” (Rev. 2:12). The church in Pergamos was the worldly church tolerating the doctrine of Balaam. “Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand” (Num. 22:31). The church in Pergamos was warned by the Lord about the toleration of evil teachers and their doctrines. “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and fight against them with the sword of My mouth” (Rev. 2:16).

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Some Thoughts on John Chapter 1

Introduction

We often encourage those who are seeking salvation and those who are newly saved to start reading their Bibles in John’s gospel, because of its apparent simplicity. Yet there are some deep and profound truths expressed in this gospel concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. John himself was a fisherman (Matthew 4:21) and was accustomed to fishing in the deep waters of the Sea of Galilee. At the beginning of his gospel John brings us into some deep and profound “spiritual waters” concerning the Son of God. Like all Biblical writers, John was inspired of the Holy Spirit. Throughout Scripture God has used men of intellect (like Isaiah and the apostle Paul), but He also has taken up those without specific educational attainments (like Amos and Peter and John himself). So it is today – God gifts and takes up whom He will. It is good to remember that!

Purpose

Two of the four gospels explicitly indicate the purpose of their writing. Luke states his purpose at the beginning (Luke 1:4), while John mentions it near the end of his gospel (John 20:31). Therefore, as we begin John’s gospel we should be left in no doubt as to why John writes about these truths first – that we may believe who He is and it might have a resultant effect on our lives.

At the very beginning of the gospel John emphasizes the identity and character of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Eternal Son of God. To the *unsaved*, the challenge of the reality of personal sin, repentance and saving faith in one who gives eternal forgiveness from sin, can only be met by one who is apart from sin in Himself and has the power to forgive sins (i.e. God). To the *believer*, the more we appreciate the value of the person of Christ (i.e. *who* He is and *what* He is), the more likely we will be to submit to His claims upon our lives. In consequence we will become more Christ-like with greater desires after holiness, greater desires for communion and fellowship with God, greater commitment to the work of God locally (the assembly), a greater desire for the salvation of souls and a greater love and respect for the saints!

John Himself

John was one of the “favoured” three disciples, together with Peter and James. Together they witnessed something of the Lord’s *power* (raising of Jairus’ daughter, Mark 5:22-43), something of His *glory* (Mount of Transfiguration, Matt. 17:1-8) and something of His *suffering* (Gethsemane, Matt. 26:36-46). John seems to have been nearer to the Lord than most (John 13:23, 19:26), and he seems to be the only one of the twelve who was present at Calvary.

John’s Gospel

It is well known that the main part of John’s gospel contains seven miracles (plus the Lord’s provision for His disciples in John’s appendix, Ch. 21) and also seven “I Am” titles of the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to this, John ch.1 reveals seven specific Divine titles of the Lord, in addition to “Jesus Christ” in verse 17. These are as follows – “the Word” (vv. 1,14), “the Light” (vv. 7-8), “the Lamb of God” (vv. 29,36), “the Son of God” (v. 34), “Rabbi/Master” (v. 38), “Jesus of Nazareth” (v. 45) and “the King of Israel” (v. 49).

So, we would like to look at *some* aspects of the person and identity of our Lord Jesus Christ in John Ch. 1 using four expressions from the chapter: (v. 1) “In the beginning”, (v. 10) “in the world”, (v. 18) “in the bosom”, and (v. 45) “in the law”. We will consider the first of these expressions in the present article; the remaining three expressions will be considered next time.

(v. 1) – “In the Beginning”

At the very commencement of this gospel, we are taken back in time. But how far back do we go? Well, the context here, a comparison with other Scriptures and Greek word tenses will decide for us. When we compare with similar expressions, as in 1John 1:1 and Genesis 1:1, then we notice that they take us back to *specific* beginnings, i.e. *specific* points in time. The first epistle of John, Ch. 1, verse 1, refers the reader back to the beginning of the *specific* time when John and others saw – and heard – the Lord Jesus as a man on Earth, yet One who had heralded from an eternal past. In Genesis 1:1 we are taken back to a *specific* point in time when God created the universe as we know it today – the author unquestionably believes in a young Earth – and from that point history began. Yet here in John’s gospel, Ch. 1, verse 1, the writer is taking us back before those specific beginnings and *not* referring to a specific point in time but to a state of existence without a beginning – that is, a continuance in the past!

The Word

Verse 1 refers to One who stepped from that continuous, uncreated, timeless state of existence into human time. To whom is John referring? It was “the Word”. It seems that only John uses this title as referring to the Lord Jesus. He refers to Him as “the Word” in his gospel (John 1:1,14), as “the Word of life” in his epistles (1John 1:1) and then as “the Word of God” in Revelation 19:13. Why the title “the Word”? This was an expression known to people at the time, but we can look at it this way – when an author writes a book (a compilation of words), he conveys to his readers something of his thoughts and his character through the words that he writes. In the same way, the Lord Jesus as the “Word of God” (Gr. *logos*) conveys to mankind God’s thoughts and God’s character. As the “Word of God”, He is the perfect, absolute, only and complete expression of Deity seen in human time! He could express to men all that God was – because He shares the essential nature of God (Col. 1:19; Heb. 1:2-3).

So, the Lord Jesus Christ as “the Word” brought to mankind all that God was and is, in the person of

manhood. He never relinquished anything at all of Deity and was unceasingly God while here as man, but He took upon Himself that which He had never previously been, and was found in fashion as a man (Phil. 2:6-8). Here we see One absolutely human, yet at the same time absolutely sinless and absolutely incapable of sinning (Heb. 4:15; 1John 3:5): a truly perfect man!

Precision of Language

The precision with which the Greek language is used brings out some profound truths in verse 1 of John Ch. 1. We notice the little word “was” is mentioned three times in the verse, this being in the Greek imperfect tense. This tense conveys the idea of “was doing” or “was being”, expressing continuance in the past. Therefore in the eternal, timeless past the Word (the Divine expression – the Lord Jesus Christ) always was: He always existed, He was always with God and He always was God. He never began to be any of these three attributes, He always was. We can say, therefore, that in His *being* He is *eternal*, in His *person* He is (and always was) *distinct* in the Godhead and in His *character* He is (and always was) essentially God.

What a comfort for us as believers to know that in whatever course of life we find ourselves, we can be confident that the One in whom we trust is an all-powerful, all-knowing God but also a God of love who knows our every circumstance and our every need. No situation is too difficult or too complex for Him. Our God is One who *knows* us (2Tim. 2:19), who *understands* us (Psalm 103:14) and who *cares* for us (1Peter 5:7).

(To be continued D.V.)

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Worship in Luke's Gospel (1)

In contrast with Mark's Gospel, where we found few references to worship as such, Luke's Gospel is full of worship and praise, joy and thanksgiving. A special aspect of the teaching of the Scriptures is that true worship is not necessarily public worship. While public worship is generally the special privilege of prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament, and male believers in the New Testament, worship can be rendered in private by any believing soul, man, woman or child. Scripture makes it clear that such individual worship is very precious to God. This is made clear especially by the inspired record of the worship of godly women such as Hannah in 1Samuel 2 and Mary in Luke 1. It is also significant that the Lord's teaching on worship in John's Gospel was given to a Samaritan woman who had just been saved, and not to Nicodemus the religious teacher of the Jews.

True worship is impossible without faith. This is the first lesson about worship in Luke's Gospel chapter 1. There was every reason for Zacharias the priest to come out of the sanctuary praising the Lord. The angel Gabriel had come from God's presence to tell him his prayer was heard and his barren wife would have a very special son. But Zacharias did not believe it. So, the Angel had to say: “Thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words” (v20). Zacharias came out in silence.

Later in the same chapter, the same angel appears far from Jerusalem, to a poor young woman in a little town only known for its bad reputation – Nazareth. This time the angel's message was even more improbable. Barren women had been granted childbirth before, even in old age, but Mary, a young virgin was to, bear a son. The only hint of such an idea was in the ancient words given to the prophet Isaiah: “A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). But how different was Mary's response. Elizabeth, Zacharias' wife declared, “Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (v45).

True worship is the blossoming of Scripture knowledge. Mary immediately bursts out in worship: “My soul doth magnify the Lord ...” (v46). Just two godly woman, one old the other young, but like Stephen later on, they were “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 6:5). Mary had no Bible, all that she knew was gleaned from the public readings in the synagogue, but her worship is full of Scripture language and Scripture truth, just as Hannah’s had been in 1Samuel 2. Here we see that the most important reason to read and study the Bible is not to teach and preach, or to win arguments, but to learn the language of worship.

True worship expresses appreciation of God. “Magnify the Lord”. We cannot, of course, make Him greater, but we can bring Him nearer and see Him more clearly as the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our understanding. First in verses 46-48, Mary rejoices in her personal relationship with Him. He is her Saviour and she is His handmaid. The word “handmaid” means a female slave. In wonderful grace, God treats us as His children, and allows us to call Him Father, but in worship and service we must always take the place of servants before His unspeakable majesty and perfect will.

Then in verse 49 she speaks of **His works**. “He that is mighty hath done to me great things”. We cannot begin to measure or describe the greatness of His works in creation, in six days speaking the universe into existence and filling the world with living things. But even more wonderful is the work of incarnation, when a body was prepared for the Son of God, a body which would be His holy sanctuary here upon earth, a body in which He would bear our sins on the tree, a body in which He would show Himself to be alive with “many infallible proofs”, a body in which He would sit upon the sapphire throne of God, far above all. The only work greater than this would be the work of the cross when He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

And **His holiness**: “Holy is His name”. In verse 35 the angel predicted that the Holy Spirit and the Holy Father, “the Highest”, would bring about the incarnation, and the result would be “that holy thing”, or “holy One”, God’s holy Son come in perfect manhood to be our kinsman redeemer.

In verse 50 she speaks of **His love**. “Them that fear Him” were only a very small remnant at that time, but His mercy was upon them. Great changes were coming in the world, Jerusalem would soon be destroyed by the Romans, but His love was unchanging and constant “from generation to generation”.

In verse 51 she speaks of **His victory**. Pride is the constant enemy of God, from the fall of Satan to the arrogance of Antichrist. But He would defeat their power by the “weakness” of Christ crucified and bring their “imagination” to nothing by the fulfilling of His eternal purpose.

In verses 52-53 she speaks of **His equity**. Appearances may suggest that there is no justice in this world, but the mighty and the rich will always “come to nought” (1Cor. 2:6) and the lowly and those who long for true spiritual satisfaction will be “exalted” and “filled ... with good things”.

In verses 54-55 she speaks of **His faithfulness**. “He hath holpen” – what wonderful help was on its way in the person of Mary’s firstborn son. Through Hosea God had said, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help” (Hosea 13:9). Faithful ever to His covenants and promises to Abraham and to his seed, the Messiah was about to come who alone could provide the basis for their fulfilment past, present and future, for time and for eternity.

As in Hannah’s praise in 1Samuel 2, we can see that Mary’s heart and mind were saturated with the word of God. Not just the well-known stories of the Pentateuch and Historical books, but the deeper utterances of the Psalms and Prophets. A good reference Bible will give some idea of the breadth of her understanding. God has given us His word to teach us to praise. Says the Psalmist: “My lips shall utter praise, when Thou hast taught me Thy statutes” (Psalm 119:171).

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 9:1-9

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, represents a significant event for: (a) himself personally; (b) the spread of the gospel; and (c) his written ministry, from which we still benefit today. It is the greatest event since Pentecost.

The vital significance of this is underscored by the seven references to it in the New Testament. It is referred to extensively in the Acts of the Apostles: here in Acts 9:1-9 historically; rehearsed to a Jewish audience in Acts 22:1-21; and to a mixed audience of Romans and Jews in Acts 26:4-23. It is also referred to in 1Corinthians 15:8-10; Galatians 1:11-17; Philippians 3:4-11 and 1Timothy 1:12-16.

Saul of Tarsus was a singular person for many reasons. He was indeed "a chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15). His intelligence was of the highest level and he had a comprehensive knowledge of the Old Testament and of Jewish thought. In addition, coming from Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 21:39), he was also immersed in Greek culture and fluent in that language. He was also a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25). As such, he was an international man both in his times and for our own.

While there were exceptional elements associated with Saul's conversion (the light, the audible voice, the blinding, etc.) in every essential respect his conversion is consistent with that of all others: there was conviction of sin; repentance; faith in, and a personal encounter with, the Lord Jesus Christ; followed by evidence of reality in worship and service.

Saul's mission (v.1,2)

At this point there was no evidence of any change in the attitude of Saul. We were introduced to him at the martyrdom of Stephen when "the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:58). Additional information was given as to his mind-set, "And Saul was consenting unto his [Stephen's] death" (Acts 8:1). This settled hostile and malevolent disposition is further described, "As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3).

This current mission of Saul was commenced with the same hatred, "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord". He was a true son of his tribe: "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: In the morning he shall devour the prey, And at night he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. 49:27). The expression "breathing" suggests that murderous and bestial threatenings were as necessary to Saul as the air that we breathe. His hostile attitude seemed to represent the reason for his very existence. However, one has to wonder whether the word "yet" suggests that his continuing attitude was in spite of something? Had the testimony and martyrdom of Stephen caused some sense of disquiet in his soul, which was being actively resisted with a renewed and excessive display of Jewish religious fervour?

So, at his own initiative, Saul approached the high priest (most likely it was still Caiaphas who sought the death of the Lord Jesus Christ) and "desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues". Some believers may have escaped Saul's purge at Jerusalem (Acts 8:3), but there were sizeable Jewish communities in many cities throughout the Roman Empire, including Damascus some 130 miles north. The documentation obtained by Saul represented the highest possible religious sanction against the believers. It was equivalent to an extradition request, valid anywhere within Judaism and a religious privilege granted by the Roman authorities.

The authorisation was clear, "if he found any of this way, whether they were men or woman, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem". It is interesting that the expression here used to describe believers in our Lord Jesus Christ is "this way". Salvation is very much more than a philosophical concept or way of thinking: it brings us into a living relationship with the Son of God; the Holy Spirit indwells; and true believers

therefore exhibit a new and all absorbing "way" of living, thinking, feeling, serving, etc. Saul who left Jerusalem to eradicate "this way", later returned to Jerusalem as an exponent and example of it!

We note this further example of Saul's particular enmity against all believers, with women being mentioned in particular (Acts 8:3; 9:2; 22:4). He wished to lead them bound, to Jerusalem where he would enforce the rigours of Jewish law on people he then considered as holding heretical views.

Saul's conversion (v.3-5)

The phrase "as he journeyed" refers to Saul's progress towards Damascus. Yet it also suggests a more profound journey upon which he was about to embark. His physical journey would, within days, change into a spiritual one. After walking for a week or so, Saul, with his companions, were now nearing Damascus totally unaware that he would have an unexpected encounter with the sovereign grace of God. "And suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven", which he described as "above the brightness of the sun" (Acts 26:13). The surpassing brightness of the divine outshining of glory, intrinsically associated with the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, arrested Saul.

Saul "fell to the earth" blinded by the light, to lie prostrate on the ground as if before a mighty conqueror. He then hears a voice from heaven, that of the ascended Christ, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" It is a personal message demanding a response. This final double-naming in Scripture is a direct and personal appeal to Saul who, in persecuting believers, was thereby also persecuting the Person of the Lord. This unanticipated and arresting intervention in Saul's life focused on his sin and appealed to his reason and his conscience. While this was an intervention of grace, it required an appropriate response if blessing was to result. Saul was not coerced or forced into salvation, his response to the message was essential. This was his own personal responsibility. His response was rational and free. It recognised the superiority of the One who was speaking "Who art Thou, Lord?", even though His full identity was not yet apparent. The answer clarified that point, however: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest". The implications are unmistakeable. The One whom he despised, whom he hated and whose followers he persecuted is alive, is divine, is all powerful, all knowing, and is speaking and requiring a response. In a very few moments Saul had a change of mind leading to a change of attitude; that is the repentance associated with the exercise of faith and the reception of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

The Lord's next words, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks", indicates that there were events leading up to this decisive moment of conversion. Saul would have heard about Christ's teaching, claims about His miracles, assertions about a bodily resurrection, the preaching of the Apostles, the lifestyle of those described as "this way", etc. Added to that he has heard Stephen's masterly address to the Sanhedrin and witnessed his martyrdom. Saul's conscience was being goaded and his increasingly excessive zeal in persecuting believers may have been his attempt to suppress troubling thoughts that were arising in his mind. While the crisis of conversion may be but a moment, it is never without events leading to it.

Saul's conversion came with an accompanying display of reverence, of submissive obedience and an honest, prayerful, request: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" This request came from a man who was trembling in body and with an astonished mind. This was a real response to the objective appearance and revelation of the resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, the very One whom Stephen saw (Acts 7:55,56). There is nothing subjective or vague in what has just taken place. Reality is seen in practical results: the free acknowledgement of Lordship and an associated willingness to obey and "do".

The communications between the Lord and Saul were direct and they continued so, "Arise". Then the next step is indicated "go into the city [Damascus], and it shall be told thee what thou must do." The path of effective service is indicated by clear commands from the Lord, which must be obeyed before the next step is disclosed! Here these were immediate oral commands by the Lord. For us His will is disclosed in the Scriptures. The Lord will never lead us contrary to His word. He requires an obedient response before giving additional directions. If these principles apply to an Apostle, we can be sure that they also apply to us!

The next steps (v.7-9)

Those accompanying Saul “stood speechless.” They heard “a voice”, that is as a sound, but without comprehending any words being articulated or seeing anyone. The message and the revelation were for Saul alone; although the others were conscious that something momentous had taken place, which blinded their leader, caused him to fall to the ground and left him helpless. These physical effects were as nothing compared to the spiritual effects, as Saul of Tarsus was never the same again!

He who intended to lead believers out of Damascus as captives is “led ... by the hand” into Damascus as a believer! Would any believer in Jerusalem, in Damascus, or anywhere else, have ever considered that such an outcome was possible? Would any have ever thought to pray for such?

Anyhow, for three days Saul is deprived of natural sight and during that time, he “neither did eat nor drink.” Indeed, deprivation of the physical and natural marked his subsequent ministry and service, but instead he drew mightily on resources that were spiritual.

(To be continued D.V.)

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ASSEMBLY SINGING

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No one will deny that most of the popular songs of the world quickly fade and are forgotten. The believer has a new song. It is not new in the sense of needing to learn it, although this happens at conversion (Ps. 40:3). It is new in the sense of that it is always new, will never grow old. We have learned Heaven’s song while still on earth and it will be new forever (Rev. 5:9). The New Testament speaks of accompaniments to our song and I would like to look at them.

SINGING WITH GLADNESS – JAMES 5:13

It can be learned from Scripture and is a fact of everyday life that people can be known by their song. No song is recorded during the days of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt. The first word of Exodus 15:1 is significant, “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD”. Redemption’s song can only be appreciated by those who know the value of the blood. It would be impossible to gauge the value of the testimony of a joyful saint. It was the song that came from the inner prison in Philippi that was heard by the prisoners. Under circumstances that gave no cause for song, Paul and Silas, with torn backs, and cruelly bound feet, sang an anthem of praise to God at midnight (Acts 16:25).

The popular songs of the day are a barometer of the emptiness of a life without Christ. Their themes are often meaningless and stoop to vulgar obscenities. Only the believer has a song of true joy and cheer, “Is any cheerful let him sing praise” (James 5:13 – RV). The quality of our singing cannot be better than our limited ability, but regardless of natural talent, or lack of it, every child of God can sing with a joyful heart unto the Lord. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit the world’s most talented vocalist cannot do this (1Cor. 14:15).

“Oh Lord we know it matters not how sweet the song may be,
No heart but of the Spirit taught, makes melody to Thee.”

SINGING WITH GRACE – COLOSSIANS 3:16

It will be obvious to the careful reader that the K.J.V. punctuation in this verse implies that the teaching and admonishing is done with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. No one would deny that this is possible, but the sense is far clearer and fits the context if a semi-colon is placed after “one another”. The last clause

then reads “In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”. The context is that the believers are to:

- (1) “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (v15 – RV). This is Rule.
- (2) “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (v16). This is Residence.
- (3) “Do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus” (v17). This is Constraint and Restraint.

A reading of the context will show that circumstances were far from perfect. There was need of “compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and longsuffering” (v12 – RV). In verse thirteen there was the possibility of a quarrel and the need of forbearance and forgiveness. In spite of all this the peace of Christ can rule in the heart. Joy has been described as the heart singing, while peace has been said to be the heart sitting down. This explains the need for grace to sing unto the Lord. How sweet the song to God must be that comes from a peaceful heart. A peaceful heart in a restless world is an unspeakable blessing.

SINGING WITH GRATITUDE – EPHESIANS 5:18-20

We have been looking at joyful hearts and peaceful hearts and now we want to look at a thankful heart. This is a subject that causes every believer to pray, “Lord unloose my stammering tongue; who should louder sing than I?”

The exhortation to be filled with the Spirit can only be understood fully when we see that the development of the paragraph beginning at verse 15 deals first with the careful walk in wisdom; then the need to buy up opportunities of service because the days are evil; then the vital need of spiritual understanding to know what the will of the Lord is; and finally the warning against being drunk with wine and the opposite truth of being filled with the Spirit. This leads us to see that a life controlled by the Word of God is a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. Such a life will be a rich blessing to others and this is the sense of the first clause of verse 19, “speaking to one another”. The imperative to be filled with the Spirit is best rendered in English, “Be ye, being filled”, and is a moment by moment exercise. If this is the case with us then our own spirit will be filled and not only will we be constrained to speak to others about that which fills our own spirits but there will be the overflow of praise to God.

The distinction between a Psalm and hymn and spiritual song may not be as easy to define as some think. A Psalm is an inspired writing, and some Psalms are hymns and some are spiritual songs. The hymn is distinctly an anthem of praise to God, while a song deals with spiritual subjects and may describe events of the dealings of God, while not being addressed directly to Him.

The word used for melody in verse 19 is generally the thought of striking a stringed instrument. It would be the usual word to describe musical accompaniment to the singing of words. It is important to notice that these strings are in the heart, tuned by the Divine hand. When believers are gathered in accordance with the New Testament pattern it is lovely to remember that the Holy Spirit is so able to bring every heart into tune that a symphony of praise ascends to God more delightful to His ear than the music of the world’s greatest symphony orchestra.

SINGING WITH GUIDANCE – 1CORINTHIANS 14:14-19

We are now going to look at an instructed heart. It should be both interesting and encouraging to us to note that this great chapter dealing with the edification of the assembly describes the three activities that we engage in today. In a meeting of a Divinely gathered assembly we sing; we pray; we teach or preach or witness. Special instruction is given regarding these vital activities of assembly meetings. We will only look at the singing.

It has often been said that seeing the New Testament is silent about music we are left to our own judgement as to the use of it. To add to this reasoning it is claimed that there are other things used in a meeting for which we have no ‘thus saith the LORD’. To argue from silence is perhaps the weakest of arguments, but can anyone really say the New Testament is silent on such issues as singing, praying and teaching? Where would we look for guidance for assembly function other than in an Epistle such as this

that deals so fully with the subject? There is a silence in 1Corinthians which is almost impossible to explain if the Holy Spirit intended the use of musical talent in the service of the Lord. There are two rather full lists of the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in Chapter 12 but a musical gift is not included. Perhaps even more important is that in Ephesians 4:11-12, where the gifts are given by the Risen Lord for the “perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”, there is no mention of a musical gift.

Four English words in 1Corinthians 14:15 translate one word in the Greek text. This is the word used for an accompaniment. “I will sing with” used twice in the verse, distinctly mentions the accompaniment. Can we substitute some other accompaniment and say we are adhering to the pattern given? If we concentrated on the two accompaniments in the verse, the spirit and the understanding, we would feel no need for any other. It is clear that spiritual singing is an activity of the spirit of the believer, and must be accompanied by spiritual understanding. It is dishonouring to the Lord to sing words of truth to God while heart and mind are occupied elsewhere.

Some years ago it was argued that music could be used in the Gospel but not in a meeting for prayer or the breaking of bread. It was not too long until some who had allowed the music in the Gospel effort found they could not keep it out of the other meetings. To call the breaking of bread the Worship meeting is most misleading. We do worship whenever the Holy Spirit so moves upon our spirits to produce worship. While this should certainly be true of the Lord’s supper it is not confined to that meeting. A hymn may produce worship in a redeemed spirit in a Gospel meeting or a meeting for ministry. Therefore to say it is correct to use mechanical music in one meeting and not another is not valid. For over seven hundred years music was unknown in gatherings of believers and in the fourteenth century was a matter of dispute. The reformers believed it was linked with the church of Rome, so it has been an innovation of modern times to find music, playing such a vital role in the work of the Gospel.

No doubt our readers understand that stringed instruments were used in the service of God by Israel as an earthly people. They had a “worldly sanctuary” with vestments, ritual and animal sacrifice which was only the shadow and has given away to the substance. The Lord Jesus in John 4, taught the highest truth regarding worship to the poor sinner of Samaria. The worship of God was to be “in spirit and in truth” without ritual, form or mechanical aid. Even in the Old Testament music was never taken into the Holiest. In 1Corinthians 3:16 this is the word that is used for the local assembly. It is the *naos* (temple), the holy of holies.

SINGING IN GLORY – REVELATION 5:9

The song of Heaven will affect the universe. John sees the Throne and more important, the Throne Occupant, the Lion who has prevailed is the Lamb who was wounded. Around that Throne are gathered the redeemed who raise their voices in the New Song of Heaven. Beyond that, he sees another circle and another, until to the farthest reaches of the Universe of God he hears glory ascribed to the Lamb in the midst of the Throne. The song of Heaven has already begun in our hearts, let us sing it with joyful, peaceful, thankful and instructed hearts.

“Let us with joy adopt the strain
We soon shall sing forever there;
Worthy’s the Lamb for sinners slain,
Worthy alone the crown to wear”.

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Get to Know Your Bible

NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 6.

ROMANS

In Roman's chapter 1, the Name of "God" occurs 22 times in the 32 verses of our English AV. Creation begins with God; "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1). The commandments begin with God; "I am the LORD thy God" (Ex. 20:2). Romans begins with; "The Gospel of God ... Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:1-3).

THE SUMMARY STATEMENT

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16-17). These last six words are the key to Romans. The "Just" means the righteous and can be so translated. "Shall live"; God is Holy and lives forever. The unrighteous cannot live; "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). How can "righteousness" and "life" be brought together? The answer is by "faith"; that is the way to righteousness and life.

Righteousness is the theme which runs throughout and forms the divisions of the book. Every blessing in Romans must be received by faith. We are justified by faith (Rom. 3:28). We have access to grace by faith (Rom. 5:2). "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). This is the basis of the Gospel. "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

THE SETTING

In the last chapter of the book of Acts, Paul in unexpected circumstances, has reached Rome (Acts 28:16). This of course, happened many years later. Paul's first contact with, "The beloved of God", at Rome was through this letter. As yet, neither he nor any of the apostles have visited Rome (Rom. 15:22-33).

Another connection with Acts may be the mention of "strangers of Rome" (Acts 2:10), being at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Some of these people may have been among the three thousand who got saved and had returned to spread the Gospel in the Imperial capital of that time. Many believers both of Jewish or Gentile background in those days, moved because of persecution or in the ordinary course of business or work. Paul did not come to Rome as a preacher but he eventually arrived as a prisoner. Yet he knew many of the believers personally by name as former fellow helpers in Christ Jesus (Rom. 16:1-16). The Sovereign guidance of the Holy Spirit can be seen in the setting of Romans as the first epistle in the canon of Scripture and dealing with "The Gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16). As the Gospel spread in the book of Acts there was evidence of the constant background of the Jew versus Gentile issue. The believers in Rome were of Gentile and Jewish ethnic background. Aquila was a Jew (Acts 18:2), others were Paul's kinsmen (Rom. 16:7,11). Paul addressed Jews directly (Rom. 2:17; 3:1); Gentiles directly (Rom. 11:13).

In a masterly way he was inspired in the doctrinal section (Ch. 4), to mention God's dealings with Abraham and Sarah his wife before the giving of the law and David the founder of the dynasty. The chronological preaching of the Gospel gave priority to the Jew first then to the Gentile, but states "Jews and Gentiles ... are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9). So all alike are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through redemption and propitiation. An objector may ask, has God abandoned His promises to Israel? Paul took three chapters (Ch. 9-11), to show that God has temporally halted His specific purposes for the chosen nation. The nation as a whole has rejected God's Son and been presently set aside. During this period God continues to have a believing remnant, 'Chosen by Grace' (Rom. 11:5), "Until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

THE SUBJECT

In the simplest and most general terms it could be said that the subject is, "The Gospel" (Rom. 1:16). More specifically it is "The righteousness of God" displayed in the Gospel (Rom. 1:17; 3:21). This righteousness from God is primarily the righteousness that God Himself possesses and manifests in all His actions. This righteousness of God is displayed by giving a standing through Grace to all who by faith believe the Gospel of Christ. This provides an imputed righteous standing before God (Rom. 5:1), Justification, and an imparted righteous practice (Rom. 6:19), Sanctification. This is brought about by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4). God's programme of righteousness is consummated through the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ that we may be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29-30), Glorification.

THE SIGNIFICANCE

Romans is to the Epistles what the brazen altar was to the Tabernacle. The way of approach into the presence of God on the grounds of sacrifice and blood shedding. "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). The way of approach is orderly; *Condemnation, Salvation, Vindication and Exhortation*.

In the Gospels the PERSON of the Gospel is revealed. In the book of the Acts the PREACHING of the Gospel is heard. In the epistle of Romans, the PRINCIPLES of the Gospel are taught.

THE STUDY

Whatever class of reader you are, you will benefit from reading Romans. To the unsaved person seeking salvation, it offers a clear declaration of their sin and ruin and God's righteous provision through faith in Christ who died for the ungodly. New believers recently saved, should be encouraged to read Romans at a very early stage of their Christian experience to give them confirmation of their identification with Christ and victory through the power of the Holy Spirit. Mature believers and students of the Word find never ending delight in its deep truths that are devotional, doctrinal, prophetic and practical. Many Bible scholars have remarked on never seeing a man tangled up in false theories who knew accurately the book of Romans. The book carries with it the blessings of salvation, security and spiritual strength that we might have firm scriptural convictions about what we believe.

THE SCENE

The scene is God's judgment court. Man is in the dock and the charge is sin. To understand the Epistle we must consider it as Paul dealing with the defence raising all kinds of arguments and answering them one by one.

Ch. 1:19-25:

Defence: Men claim that they do not know that there is a God.

Prosecution: They reject the witness, of Creation (1:25).

Ch. 1:26-2:16:

Defence: If men reject God, God has abandoned them to their lusts.

Prosecution: Men have rejected the witness, of their own conscience (2:15).

Ch. 2:17-3:8:

Defence: Men may sin, but there are those (Jews) who claim moral elevation, they are better than others.

Prosecution: They have rejected the witness and condemnation of their own conduct (3:8).

Ch. 3:9-18:

Indictment: Seven Scriptures are quoted to summarise the case against all mankind: "None righteous".

Defence: Withdrawn; "Every mouth may be stopped" (3:19).

Verdict: "All the world ... guilty before God" (3:19).

This includes us "All", you and me. I stand in the dock with my head bowed, I have sinned, I am guilty, "Whose damnation is just". What am I to do? I step down from the dock and point to Another Who takes

the stand in my place. “But now” (Rom. 3:21), beautiful worlds. There is no more definite division in the whole Bible.

“The righteousness of God (the great subject of Romans) without the law is manifested”. The witness; “Being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:21). “Even the righteousness of God (stressed again) which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22). “Being justified freely by His Grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith, (RV punctuation) in His blood, to declare His righteousness ... To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:24-29).

Justification, means to be declared righteous, “We believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 4:24-5:1). “We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:11). “Even so might Grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:21).

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (8:1) – NO CONDEMNATION

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” (8:31) – NO WITNESSES

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” (8:33) – NO PROSECUTION

“Who is he that condemneth?” (8:34) – NO CHARGE

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (8:35) – NO EXECUTIONER

THE STRUCTURE

After the lengthy introduction of chapter 1:1-17, the doctrine of the Righteousness of God is developed by the inspired writer in four distinct sections, each with a defined beginning and ending.

Ch. 1:18-3:20: *Condemnation* – “The Wrath of God”

Beginning: “The wrath of God is revealed” (1:18).

Ending: “All the world may become guilty before God” (3:19).

Ch. 3:21-8:39: *Salvation* – “The Righteousness of God”

Beginning: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested” (3:21).

Ending: Nothing; “Shall be able to separate us from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).

Ch. 9:1-11:36: *Vindication* – “The wisdom of God”

Beginning: “That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart ... For my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:1-3).

Ending: Doxology to this section vindicating God’s dealing with Israel. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!” (11:33).

Ch. 12:1-16:27: *Exhortation* – “The Will of God”

Beginning: “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (12:1-21).

Ending: Another tremendous doxology; “To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen” (16:27).

THE SECTIONS

How righteousness is obtained by faith through grace as the basis of eternal life is unfolded in a very logical orderly way in the main sections:

Ch. 1-2 – RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIRED

Ch. 3-5 – RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

Ch. 6-8 – RIGHTEOUSNESS RECKONED

Ch. 9-11 – RIGHTEOUSNESS REJECTED (by Israel)

Ch. 12-16 – RIGHTEOUSNESS REPRODUCED

THE SEQUEL (Chapters 12-14)

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REPRODUCED IN THE DAILY LIVES OF THE BELIEVERS.

This is manifest in practical self-presentation to God; the use of spiritual gifts in the church, behaviour in society, duty to the state and in the service of the saints. Bringing man into right relationship with God continues to be the background of chapters 15 and 16 which are integral to the epistle.

“Now the God of Patience and Consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus” (Rom. 15:5).

“Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Rom. 15:13).

“Now the God of Peace be with you all. Amen” (Rom. 15:33).

“And the God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (Rom. 16:20).

This tremendous Epistle ends with this benediction of serenity, security and tranquillity. The God of righteousness is our God, the God of Peace.

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Sound Doctrine

“... If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing ...” (1Timothy 6:3,4)

Repentance and Faith towards God

Our Lord Jesus Christ preached about repentance, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15), “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). The apostles also “went out, and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12). On the Day of Pentecost it was an important part of Peter’s message, “Repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). And right through the Acts of the Apostles this word constantly confronts us, “Repent”, “Repent”, and “Repent” (Refer. Acts 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

What is meant by repentance then? It means – a complete change of heart and mind, to think and act differently, to reconsider, a turning point *from* sin *to* God. Merely feeling sorry for sin is not the main thrust at all. It is because once we commence to apprehend God differently there is bound to be sorrow for our past sins, “Let the wicked *forsake* his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him *return* unto the LORD” (Isa. 55:7). That is what repentance ultimately means.

The self-righteous one is to humble himself, and see that all his righteousness is but “filthy rags” in God’s

sight (Isa. 64:6). The idolater is to abhor his idols, and accept that there is but *one true* and living God. The sinner is to change his attitude towards God and to realize that the holy God loves him, though He hates his sin, and that God is ready and willing to forgive him for Christ's sake.

In Acts 17:30, we read of Paul preaching, "God ... now commandeth all men every where to repent". In 2Peter 3:9 we also read that, the Lord is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance".

Scripture passages like John 1:12; Acts 16:30,31; Romans 3:26 and numerous other passages make it plain and stress that salvation come readily to those who really believe in His Name. God justifies the sinner who ***believes in Jesus Christ***, the Sin-bearer and the Redeemer.

Many believe that repentance is the first essential step, and it has to be followed by the second step of believing, for a sinner to be saved. In Acts 20:17-21, the apostle Paul, when speaking to the elders of Ephesus, reminds them of the nature of his ministry. He was faithful to testify to both the Jews and Gentiles, "*repentance* towards God, and *faith* toward our Lord Jesus Christ". A careful look into Paul's preaching would show that here he is not preaching *two steps* for salvation. They are not two separate steps but *one act of saving faith*. When preaching the gospel these two truths should not be separated as two different steps. They always go together. They are brought together and are wonderfully presented together in the simple precious word "believe".

It is the Holy Spirit that *convicts* and "reproves the world of sin", and it is the self-same Spirit that enables us to *look* to "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). It is the Holy Spirit who *points* us to Jesus Christ, and makes us *look* to Him for our salvation. It is therefore clear that repentance towards God followed by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as found in Acts 20:20 go together.

Salvation is by Faith alone and not by Works or Deeds

It is in this that the fundamental difference is clearly seen between the true way of Salvation as revealed in the Bible and the one held by other religions and man-made systems and philosophies.

The Bible teaches that man is already ruined and undone on account of his sin and he is condemned of God. His acts of merit in the eyes of a holy God are but as "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6): man's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9): in fact, he is *dead* in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1); hence he is unable to ***do*** anything to save himself, and is shut up to the grace of God. The whole of mankind is 'locked' under condemnation, as found in Romans 3:23; but the 'key' to faith is found in verse 24, and if it is used properly the sinner is set at liberty.

The Scripture says that we are saved "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8; see also Rom. 10:9; John 3:16; Acts 13:38,39).

The entire work of our salvation was completed by Christ on Calvary; who there, by the shedding of His blood, ransomed the sinner by making full atonement for his sin – He died that we might live. Salvation is the ***gift of God*** "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23), and ***faith*** is the hand that takes (receives) God's gift. Faith takes (receives) God at His word, just believes that He has laid on Christ all our iniquity (Isa. 53:6), and by *believing* obtains "redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14).

Salvation is Not by Part-Faith and Part-Works

This is the pit into which the church at Galatia had fallen. When the Jewish brethren arrived, they began to teach perverse doctrines, advocating the necessity of circumcision to be saved. Throughout the ages, religious people try to add good works and self-efforts along with grace and faith. The Galatians quickly fell under such a bewitching spell. Paul was righteously incensed and compelled to write a letter to them using strong words, "O foolish Galatians!" (Gal. 3:1). Nothing less than the truth of the gospel was at stake. There can be no compromise, else the power of the *only* message to deliver souls from sin and Satan and the curse of this world, would become null and void. Such man-made teachings with any form of works and good

deeds whether they be Judaism, Romanism or ritualism, threaten the *true way* of salvation. The gospel liberty we enjoy in Jesus Christ would be lost.

Jews or Gentiles, religionist or rationalist, *bakthiman* or *karmayogi* are all alike before God. There is but one gospel, *one way* of being justified before the righteous God, *one way* of receiving the Holy Spirit of God, *one way* of becoming a son and heir of God and that is only *through grace, and by faith* in Jesus Christ.

One and Only One Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not one among many. Nor is there a different derivative from this exclusive one. The first chapter of Galatians reveals to us five aspects about the gospel of Christ:

1. Any preacher, human or angelic, who does not preach this *apostolic gospel* is fit to be damned.
2. The message is not *after* any man, that is, it is not *invented* by man.
3. It was not received *from* man.
4. It was not originally *taught* by the apostle Paul. It is not his.
5. This gospel came to Paul as a direct *revelation* from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The one and only gospel originated from God Himself. Preachers take heed! Let all believers beware of the preacher who *adds* to or *takes away* anything from this gospel of Christ. Any slight variation in this God-given gospel would become, "*another gospel*" – another gospel with a *qualitative* difference and of a *different kind*. Let us beware of this horrible danger.

Satan and Wickedness

World religions do not recognize an enemy, because of which, they beat about the bush. They are unaware what the real problem for mankind is. Thus they are not able to offer a real answer to man's woes. Religions and philosophers attribute all evil and wickedness and all ills found among mankind and in this world as something bad. All that is not '*dharma*' is '*adharma*' is the common line of thinking. They think that they exist, as it were. They conclude that all bad things, which we call evil and wickedness have come of their own, and stay as they are. They also consider that they can gradually be improved upon, whereas the truth is not so. There is an enemy behind all this. The Bible clearly and emphatically declares that they proceed from *one person*, a real and living person, embodied with the devilish character and nature called Satan. Satan is the embodiment of evil and wickedness. He is a real person having a personality with an evil power.

The New Testament mentions the plurality of evil spirits, with Satan as their head (Matt. 8:28; 9:34; 12:26; Luke 11:8,19). They are endowed with great talents, power and knowledge (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24). He is described as the enemy (Matt. 13:19,39; Mark 4:15). The Bible teaches that the devil is a real person with a personality (Zech. 3:1) and with an independent will (Job 1:6-12; 2:1 cf.). He is not an illusion or an imaginary person. Neither is he a mythological character. Our Lord Himself declared Satan as "a murderer" and as "the father of all lies" (John 8:44), as one not abiding in the truth, and as the enemy and falsifier of God's word (Matt. 13:19,39).

As love, truth and holiness are the characteristics of God, so malice or hatred (the source of murder), lying, and uncleanness characterize Satan. His "power" is that of darkness, from which Christ delivers His people, as He is the "power" of light.

Satan is a "spirit". He is called the "prince of the power of the air" and as "working in the children of disobedience". He is the "prince of the demons" (Eph. 2:2). He is the head of an organized "kingdom" (Matt. 12:24-26), with his subjects, the fallen angels. He possesses untiring energy, going to and fro, as a "roaring lion", subtle and instilling venom, gliding stealthily onto his victims as the "serpent" or "dragon". He is not omnipresent like God, but goes from one place to another, always working against God and His children (Job 2:2,3).

Satan's 'throne' opposes Christ's heavenly throne (Rev. 4:2; 2:9,10,13). He has his own "principalities and

powers” in his organized kingdom, in mimicry of all that is heavenly (Rom. 8:38; 1Cor. 15:24; Col. 2:15; Eph. 6:12). He instigates persecution and he is the real persecutor himself.

Satan being the author of sin, is the author of its consequence viz., death, as well as the violator of God’s law (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). He makes death the executioner of sin and man, Satan’s “lawful captive”. The Lord Jesus by His death on the cross has “bruised his head” (Gen. 3:15). He gave death its death blow and took the prey from the mighty one (Satan), as David cut off Goliath’s head with his own sword (Isa. 49:24; Ps. 8:2; Matt. 12:29; Luke 10:19; 2Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14).

Now the proclamation of the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is to liberate men who are captives of the enemy, Satan. They are imprisoned under the power of his darkness, while Christ brings them into liberty and into that marvellous light which He won on the cross. Therefore, when we preach the gospel, we must be aware that we are working against a might enemy, Satan and his kingdom.

We should bear in mind this important factor. We are not just preaching an ideology but liberating men from Satan’s clutches and bringing to liberty and under the authority of another, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are literally opposing the real enemy, Satan, and so we must be prepared to meet its consequences.

Thus, when we present the gospel to our audience, we must make it clear that they are under the bondage of Satan and all wickedness and help them to understand it. Once they realize this vital fact, then there will be a real and earnest seeking for the gospel truth (John 17:17). May we be faithful in this and act as ambassadors of Jesus Christ our Lord (2Cor. 5:19,20).

Eternal Punishment for the Wicked

God forbid that we should not preach about Hell. This awful fact must be proclaimed with an evident compassion, and thus we must warn listeners of “judgment to come”. The less men believe in its reality, the more we need to emphasize it. It is not part of the gospel, so to speak. The gospel means good news, but it is *a warning* of what must happen to those who *reject* the gospel. Many who are not touched by the thought of the love of God in Christ Jesus, are spiritually awakened by the fear of hell. In our preaching, the element of God’s judgment should always be brought out – it is the sign of the love of God. The greatest test of the quality of our preaching is whether or not it brings every one to judgment. When the truth is preached, the Spirit of God brings each person face to face with God Himself.

No one loved mankind as our Lord Jesus Christ did, and yet only in Scripture is it recorded of Him as having spoken so often of the awful end of the unrepentant sinner (see. Matt. 5:22,29,30; 7:13,21-23; 8:11,12; 10:28; 11:20-24; 12:31,32; 13:40,42,49,50; 18:8,9; 22:13; 25:41 – There are of course many other references in the other gospels too).

A clear emphasis on God’s righteousness in judgment, because of the grievousness of sin against Him, is much needed. We must stick to Scriptures when we describe Hell and God’s punishment. The length of punishment is stated as being “for ever and ever”, “everlasting”, “eternal”. In Matthew 25:46 our Lord says: “And these shall go away into *eternal* punishment: but the righteous into *eternal* life” R.V). The same Greek word is being used to denote the length of both the punishment of the wicked and the blessedness of the saved.

This thought should spur us on to be more earnest and prompt us to seek out those that are lost, with a strong sense of urgency.

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The Death of Christ Secures God's Praise

Of the Messianic Psalms, Psalm 22 is possibly the best known and most easily recognized. It is a well-known fact that it is in two parts: in verse 21 the tone changes from the anguished prayer of the Sufferer to the joyous praise of the Delivered. Actually, the first verse of each section is quoted not only of Christ, but by Christ. Upon the cross, in the most solemn circumstances of suffering as the Sin-bearer, the Lord Jesus cried aloud of His grief and abandonment in the very words of the first verse of this psalm; "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

With remarkable clarity the Psalm depicts the sufferings of crucifixion, a mode of execution not practised among the Jews.

Agonies of soul as well as agonies of body are described by the Holy Sufferer, and besides the multiplicity of His pangs He relates the multiplicity of His foes. The strong bulls of Bashan indicate the leaders among God's professed people, the Jews, prosperous in the abundance of God's blessing, but rendered carnal by their affluence. Their cruel and contemptuous derision is inhuman as well as unspiritual.

In the dogs which compass Him about, the assembly of the wicked which enclose Him, we see the Gentiles, the Romans who were then in power in Immanuel's land. The whole world was represented at the cross, in its opposition to God and to His Christ. But beyond fallen man, and behind him, is that malign and murderous enemy of God and man, Satan, here figured as the lion (v21); and in him and his enmity the sufferings of Christ are seen to reach their climax. In that most solemn hour when heaven and earth and hell afflict Him, the Sufferer stands alone.

The plea's of the first part of the Psalm were among the prayers and supplications of the days of His flesh, offered up with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him out of death, and the second part reveals how He was heard in that He feared, or, for His piety (Hebrews 5:7). The two words in this verse "cry" and "hear" (lit, fully hear) are the very words employed in the Septuagint Version in Psalm 22:24. "When He cried unto Him, He heard". They are also the words of verse 2, speaking of that time when Christ the Sin-bearer was abandoned of God and His cries were not heard. Compare Psalm 69:3. Once the great work of putting away human sin was accomplished, how readily God responded to those heartfelt cries!

Yet with all the dreadful sufferings of Christ, His shame and His pain, including His being forsaken of God as never a godly soul had ever been forsaken in all the history of the faithful, there is never one word of reproach or criticism, never one note of bitterness. Even in His desolation He justified God and proclaims it a demand of God's intrinsic holiness, not a violation of it. "But Thou art holy" is declared to be the basis of His cross-work.

The faith of "the afflicted" is severely tested, but never wavers. His Father from all eternity became His God from His mother's belly. In incarnation He assumed a place of dependence. From the womb onwards He had been cast upon God, treading a path of confidence in Him. Yet His faith was not rewarded as was the faith of the fathers, for He had come to do a work that they could never do, and that involved bearing a load that they could never bear. He had to be brought into the dust of death, but on the third day He was brought out of death, and from verse 22 of the Psalm we have the resurrection joy of Christ, the joy set before Him for which He endured the cross, despising the shame. And the keynote is struck in the first verse of the section, "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation (assembly) will I praise Thee".

This phrase "My brethren" is taken up by the risen Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:10 and John 20:17, and then the verse is quoted specifically of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:12. Even in His

sufferings Christ could address His God as “Thou that inhabitest (or dwellest amidst) the praises of Israel” (v3). This is a beautiful thought, regarding God as permanently surrounded by the praises of His people Israel. But the present verse lifts us far beyond even this. Here we have a company who are described individually as “My brethren”, and corporately as “the congregation (assembly)”. To this company is personally vouchsafed by Christ a new revelation of God, in order that, as “the Chief-musician” who is “in the midst of” them, He might personally lead them in praise to God.

In the Psalm itself we have a millennial scene (v28), but the application in the epistle to the Hebrews is clearly to “the church”. The church will have a place in the millennial kingdom, but presently it includes the saved of “the seed of Jacob ... the seed of Israel” (v23) and also those from “all the ends of the world ... all the kindreds of the nations” (v27). These are the many sons, the saved (of Hebrews 2:10), the sanctified (v11). Since Christ is “all of one” with them, He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

So, the writer of the epistle exhorts them, “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession (confession), Christ Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1). It will be observed that this twofold designation of Christ Jesus answers broadly to the two parts of the verse in the psalm; as the Apostle He declares His Father’s name to His brethren, and as the High Priest He presents their praise and worship to God.

But it will be seen that this magnificent vision of universal praise and worship is the great joy of Messiah in resurrection. His object is to declare His Father’s name to those who are now linked to Him in bonds of divine life, and gathered around Him in the beauty of divine liberty. These are they who know no other Leader save Himself, the Centre of their gathering. We must remember that what will be true in the millennial kingdom, what is true in principle of the church, the body of Christ, can only find present practical expression in a corporate way upon earth in a “church (assembly) of God”, a New Testament assembly of believers gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for here only on earth does Christ reign supreme. Here only is He given His rightful place. Here only is He free to touch the hearts of His people and lead them out in spiritual exercise as He will, free at once from both the traditions of men and the innovations of men.

This is the great longing of the heart of the risen Christ, that He should so reveal to His own people the glories of the name of His God and Father that they will wish to respond to His own song of praise to God, to “praise Him”, to “glorify”, to “fear Him”, to “remember and turn unto the Lord”, and to “worship before Him”.

The One who upon the cross was surrounded by the mocking laughter of His foes, desires in the church to be surrounded by the praises of His brethren. Only by His suffering and abandonment could they ever have become His brethren. In His suffering unto death they learn the holiness of the Father’s name (v3); in His deliverance out of death they learn the righteousness of the Father’s name (v31). From the threshold of the cross, as it were, He prayed to One who was His “Holy Father” and “Righteous Father”, and said “I have declared unto them Thy name, and will declare it” (John 17:11,25,26). There is food for the soul here that Christ will gladly share with us, food that will satisfy (Psalm 22:26) and build up (v29), and that will not lead to complacency and ungodliness, but to praise and worship.

As we are gathered together in divine simplicity with Himself “in the midst” as the Leader of the praise, as we, by the Spirit’s help, ponder afresh “the sufferings of Christ” so graphically and feelingly depicted in the Psalm, as we hear again those heart-wringing entreaties, and as we move on to the ultimate deliverance, with its peculiar joy and longing to reveal the glories of God’s name to the new and ever-increasing company of the ransomed, should not our hearts be deeply moved in songs of praise to the One whose name He has declared? His desolation and deliverance will fail of their sweetest fruits if they find us still ignorant of the Father’s Name, or unresponsive when He would lead us to Him in praise.

It is His mind that we might “with one mind and one mouth glorify the God, even Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” for “Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name” (Romans 15:6,8,9).

We are a seed whose privilege it is to serve Him (Psalm 22:30) and however we may render the second part of the verse the fact remains that it is our duty to proclaim what we have learned of what God has done in Christ, so that a future generation may in turn become fitted to enter into the same holy privilege (Psalm 78:1-8).

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God's Faithfulness

"Hitherto hath the LORD Helped us" (1Samuel 7:12)

O Fathomless mercy! O infinite grace!
With humble thanksgiving the road I retrace,
Thou never hast failed me, my Strength and my Stay!
To whom should I turn for the rest of the way?

Through dangers, through darkness, by day and by night,
Thou ever hast guided, and guided aright:
In Thee have I trusted, and peacefully lay,
My hand in Thy hand for the rest of the way.

The cross all my refuge, Thy Blood all my plea,
None other I need, Blessed Jesus but Thee!
I fear not the shadows at close of life's day,
For Thou wilt go with me the rest of the way.

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Will Ye Also Go Away?

There was a note of sadness and disappointment in His question. The testing time had come and many were going back to walk no more with the Lord. Would He not repeat the question were He with us to-day? Every great movement in the religious world, carries with it, for good or evil, a certain enthusiasm. When the smoke clears away, and the excitement dies down, things get back to normal, and then true discipleship is out to the test. This is why Sardis is such a disappointment, looked at from God's viewpoint. Much was made of justification by faith; but little was made of God's only Centre of gathering – the Lord Jesus Christ. National churches were organised, but little or no heed was paid to God's word, as to how a church should be planted and sustained. The great masses of professing Christians went back to a modified form of Romanism. The same sad tale is true of all the great revivals, from the 16th century to the present time. There has been a tragic four cycles of events, in all God's dealings with His people – Defection – Discipline – Deliverance – Degeneration. Well may the Lord say: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2:22).

Some time ago a lengthy circular letter was sent to us seeking to prove that the church order of Acts 2 was primitive and imperfect, and that 1Corinthians was the order for to-day, as unity was the first thing and order a secondary matter. Then another article comes to us to show that the church spoken of in Matthew 18 was the Jewish gathering in the synagogue, and that there can be no local church to-day. Then a third article comes to tell us that Matthew 18:20 is for a prayer meeting, and that later research in the Greek

proves Darby, Newberry, etc., incorrect in their interpretation of this text – and that we must not use it to say that we are Christians gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus or else we make ourselves a terrible sect.

In the articles referred to there is usually an appeal to the Greek, and an air of superior knowledge is manifested – similar to the *higher critic* over the fundamentalist. Many of God's beloved people who only know a little English and less grammar are perplexed and unsettled. Now it means all to us, the right or wrong interpretation of God's holy Word. Twenty eight years ago, God's order in the Acts was brought home to us, as we knelt before an open Bible. We were baptized, and left human names behind, and we were received into an assembly, gathered to the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Three years later, that same assembly commended us to the Lord's work in Venezuela.

For 25 years, with the help of others, whom God has raised up, we have preached the gospel to the benighted Roman Catholics – not where others have laboured: and as we could see no place where the great pattern gospel preacher – the apostle Paul – used a musical instrument, or spoke about one in the churches that he planted, we followed the same course here and we have found that God can use the gospel to draw, save and keep. Hundreds of Roman Catholics have been saved, baptized and gathered in church-fellowship in accordance with the Acts and Epistles. Now we hear, that because we only knew the English version, that we are all wrong in not having an organ, and a grievous sect because we have taught the Lord's people to gather in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

We marvel how some of those writers talk so glibly about the Greek. We have been studying Spanish – one of the easiest languages – for 25 years, and yet how deficient we find ourselves, even at translating English to Spanish. But withal, some of those writers, fear not to speak lightly of men of God, who have made Greek a life study.

The way some of those writers speak of Matthew 18:20 would lead us to think, that this is the only passage in God's Word where it speaks about being gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus.

But let us turn to 1Corinthians and we will find that the word "church" is used some 18 times where it could not possibly refer to the Church in its universal aspect; but *only* to a local company of Christians as in Corinth. Then at least some 8 times the Apostle refers to being gathered together, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. If he does not always use the full expression, it is implied. "In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ when ye are *gathered together*" (1Cor. 5:4). Here no fanciful interpretation can make this to mean a prayer meeting. It was an assembly meeting for discipline: and the fornicator was to be put away from "among yourselves" not the Lord's table merely – as a "wicked person". "Now in this that I declare unto you ... that ye *come together* not for the better, but for the worse" (1Cor. 11:17). This coming together refers to the Lord's Supper and not to a prayer meeting. In 1Corinthians 11:18 the *coming together* refers to any church meeting. 1Corinthians 11:33-34 clearly refers, as we know, to the Lord's Supper. 1Corinthians 14:23 would speak of a ministry meeting. 1Corinthians 14:26 give instructions as how to conduct a profitable ministry meeting.

"The LORD preserveth the simple" (Psa. 116:6). We firmly believe, that it is still possible to carry out the New Testament principles of preaching the gospel without organs, of baptizing believers, of forming a local church, and of receiving into and putting away from that church. Yea, we go further, and state that we have seen it in practice in Venezuela for 25 years, and quite a number of local churches have been planted – not "mission stations" – where there has been room for all God's Word to be ministered, the Lordship of Christ has been owned, and room for the Holy Spirit to use whomsoever He will. We certainly do not believe that in seeking thus to honour the Lord and His Word we form a sect.

There is a great fear among preachers to-day of speaking out the simple, wholesome Word of the Lord. But let us be loyal to the truth in love. Let us encourage every believer to be baptized, and then let us encourage them to be separated from all that is contrary to God's Word and then to gather in the blessed holy Name of our adorable Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, let us meet in His Name to pray, we need more of it – let us gather in His Name to study His Word, there is nothing like it; and then best and highest of all, let us gather together to remember Him, whom God delights to honour; and gathering thus we will not forget the

preaching of the gospel, both in the hall and in the open-air, nor shall we forget the gospel for those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death in what is called the “foreign field”.

Beloved children of God, do not let the sophistry of men, who run from assembly to assembly, take from us the old “land marks”. We have proved that God’s word works. It goes and grows. Are we to give up that for an amalgamation of Christians with no fixed principles, no decided convictions – a wishy-washy, sentimental sort of a thing, where God’s Word is at a discount and men’s arrangements at par? Will ye also go away? The Lord help us one and all, who love His Name, and His beloved people to say with outspoken Peter: “Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

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MEN OF GOD SERIES

(2) JOSEPH : GOD WAS WITH HIM (Part 1)

“The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob” (Genesis 49:24)

JOSEPH IS A BEAUTIFUL TYPE OF THE LORD JESUS IN SUFFERING.

Joseph said: “Think on (remember) me when it shall be well with thee” (Gen. 40:14). The Lord Jesus Christ said: “This do in remembrance of Me” (1Cor. 11:24).

Joseph was the Son of his father’s love (Gen. 37:3). The coat of many colours, the tunic with sleeves, was the privilege of the heir, born of the beloved Rachel. “He sent a man before them” (Psa. 105:17). “The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1John 4:14).

Joseph was rejected by his brethren, reminding us of the rejection of the Son of God. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11). “This is the heir; come, let us kill Him” (Matt. 21:38). His brethren hated him. “They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Gen. 37:4). “They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head” (Psa. 69:4). “I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother’s children” (Psa. 69:8).

Joseph reported their evil. The Lord said of the world: “Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7). His father “Sent him out of the vale of Hebron” (Gen. 37:14). “The Vale” mean fellowship, communion. Christ left heaven, the repose of the Eternal Son. “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person” (Heb. 1:3). Joseph went to Shechem, (Gen. 37:13), which means “shoulder”, the strength of service. The Good Shepherd found the sheep and “Layeth it on His shoulders” (Luke 15:5). “The government shall be upon His shoulder” (Isa. 9:6). Joseph, “found them at Dotham” (Gen. 37:17), which means “the law or custom”. The Lord came to a people in bondage. “To preach deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18).

“They stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours” (Gen. 37:23). Hence they repudiated his sonship. As with the Lord, they cried, “Away with this Man” (Luke 23:18). “They part My garments among them” (Psa. 22:18). He was cast into a pit by Jewish hands. He was abandoned in a pit to hold water and the narrow entrance was blocked by a stone. Compare the words, “Thou hast laid Me in the lowest pit: in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon Me, and Thou hast afflicted Me with all Thy waves” (Psa. 88:6).

They sold Joseph “For twenty pieces of silver” (Gen. 37:28). Judas, “Brought again the thirty pieces of silver”, “He cast down the pieces of silver in the temple”, “The price of Him that was valued” (Matt. 27:3,5,9). He was delivered into Gentile hands. (Gen. 37:36). The leaders of Israel said: “We have no king but Cæsar” (John 19:15).

They “put him into the prison” (Gen. 39:20). The Lord was: “Numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). There was two prisoners in; “The place where Joseph was bound” (Gen. 40:3). “When they were come to

the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left" (Luke 23:33). Pharaoh dreamed and the prisoners dreamed: "They dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night" (Gen. 40:5; 41:1). Pilates wife said: "I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him" (Matt. 27:19). Pharaoh the king "was troubled" and hoped for an interpretation (Gen. 41:8). Herod the king: "Hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him" (Luke 23:8). One of the prisoners, like the malefactor was forgiven (Gen. 40:21). "To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The other was hung upon a tree (Gen. 40:19).

There are four periods in Joseph's life that we should consider:

1. SONSHIP
2. STEWARDSHIP
3. SUFFERING
4. SOVEREIGN

1. SONSHIP

John's Gospel stresses the PREMINENCE of the SON. In John 4, to the woman at the well, He is revealed as the Seventh Man. This incident occurred; "Near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" (John 4:5).

In Genesis 45:13 Joseph said; "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt". In John 17:24 The Lord Jesus said; "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory"

2. STEWARDSHIP

Mark's Gospel tells us about the PURITY of the SERVANT. Joseph as a teenager was tested at home. His grandfather was blind and died about the time that Joseph was sold into Egypt. His father was a cripple. His mother was dead. His brethren, "hated" (3 times) him. The more he loved and served them the more they hated him. They treated him with malice, envy, cruelty, robbery, lies and plotted his murder. "Who was sold for a servant" (Psa. 105:17).

In his twenties he was tested as to his purity. Sold for the second time; he was in the house of Potiphar: "He served him" (Gen. 39:4). All of Joseph's masters trusted him. There is no record of complaint, no anger, no revenge. The temptation by the wicked seducer was prolonged; she "cast her eyes upon Joseph", "day by day" (Gen. 39:7,10). The Perfect Servant; "Was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan" (Mark 1:13). He could say; "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me". The key verse in Mark's Gospel is chapter 10:45, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (serve), and to give His life a ransom for many".

3. SUFFERING

Luke's Gospel is the Gospel of the SON OF MAN, THE MAN OF SORROWS. We read of Joseph in prison, in fetters; "whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron" (Psa. 105:18). "The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him" (Gen. 49:23). "We saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear" (Gen. 42:21).

Joseph is associated with four houses. He was faithful in every house he entered. Luke records fourteen houses that the Lord entered. The Lord never encountered a need that He did not meet. The Gospels tell of the roads He walked, the villages He visited, the houses He entered, the tables where He sat. An early journey was into Egypt. "Called My Son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1). When Joseph came seeking the welfare of his brethren, they sat down to eat the food that he brought while he starved in a pit, they denied his birthright, they rejoiced at his bondage as they sold him as a slave into Egypt. The pit, Potiphar's house was followed by the prison where he was forgotten. Perhaps it was there that the iron entered into his soul. "He was despised and rejected of men"; like the Saviour, He was "a man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

4. SOVEREIGN

Matthew is the Gospel of the SOVEREIGN, “the Son of David” (Matt. 1:1). “Where is He that is born King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2). It is interesting that the wise men said; “We have seen His star in the east”. The early words of Joseph declared; “Behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me” (Gen. 37:9).

Stephen says: “The patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of 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” (Acts 7:9-10).

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Questions and Answers

Question: What is meant by the expression; “Baptized for the dead;” repeated twice in 1Corinthians 15:29?

Answer: The context of this verse is found in a section of the chapter which begins in verse 12 with the question, “If Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?” The apostle answers that question in the rest of the section, which continues to verse 34. The consequences which follow if there is no resurrection are; Christ is not risen; preaching is in vain; faith is vain; the apostles are false witnesses; the Corinthians are still in their sins; those who have fallen asleep in Christ are perished; there is no hope beyond this life (vv13-19). In verses 20-28, which are in brackets, Paul affirms that Christ is indeed risen, with glorious outcomes. He then resumes the main argument at verse 29, showing further consequences if there be no resurrection from the dead.

One of these consequences means that water baptism is of no value. We know from other Scriptures that in this ordinance believers are identified with Christ in His death and in His resurrection. “We are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4); “Ye are ... buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him” (Col. 2:11-12). Therefore Paul points out that there is no value in baptism if there is no resurrection of the dead.

Mr W.E.Vine notes that a slight change in punctuation in the English translation will help to make the meaning clearer. He suggest, “Else what shall they do which are baptised? It is for (in the interests of) the dead, if the dead are not raised at all. Why then are they baptised for them?” The first question in the verse asks what is the value of being baptised if there is no resurrection. The statement in the next sentence plainly affirms that baptism could not then identify us with the risen Christ and would, in fact, rather be in the interest of dead ones, and so be of no value whatever.

Many suggestions have been made to explain this verse. Some have connected it with the thought of suffering and martyrdom. It is not about newly-baptised people filling the ranks of believers who have died, and it is certainly nothing at all to do with the practice of baptising on behalf of those who have already died. These suggestions cannot be supported by any other Scriptures in the New Testament.

... For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: (Romans 6:5)

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**For He hath made Him to be sin
for us, who knew no sin; that we
might be made the righteousness
of God in Him. (2Corinthians 5:21)**

After the Israelites had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt and the law had been given through Moses and the Tabernacle set up in the midst of their encampment, it was pronounced that everyone with leprosy, or that had an issue (i.e. haemorrhage), or was defiled by a dead body must be put outside the camp, both males and females (Num. 5:1-4). Here they had to remain until they were pronounced clean, when, after ceremonially cleansing, they could return to their tents, to their families and more significantly into the full privileges of service and worship of God. This separation was in order that the camp would not be defiled, in the midst of which the LORD their God dwelt. Although solemn for those concerned, this requirement reminds us of the absolute holiness of God which, not only kept the defiled at a distance from the camp, but also ensures that we **ALL** as guilty sinners are unfit and unable to have true fellowship and communion with God until we have been cleansed and our defiling sins put away, ***“O LORD, ... Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity”*** (Hab. 1:12,13).

Leprosy was the most serious of these defiling conditions; it could affect the whole body and readily infect others. When an individual was suspected with this fearful disease which was not immediately obvious, they were shut up for seven days, a form of ***“Isolation”***, and then re-examined by the priest; a further seven days of ***“Isolation”*** could follow and hair could be shaven off around the affected area to enable clearer scrutiny. What apprehensive days these must have been! Was it a scab, a boil, a dry scall or the fearful leprosy (Lev. 13)? How dreadful when after further examination the priest had to pronounce, ***“It is a leprosy”*** (v8).

Leprosy, reminds us of the defiling sin that permeates our thoughts and influences how we use the members of our bodies. Some find it hard, even will not admit that they are affected by this spiritual disease, not willing to face the evidence and the truth, deceiving themselves that it is not so serious and will have no dire consequences for them. But unlike present day diseases which can affect individuals differently, **SIN IS DEADLY FOR ALL**, and needs to be addressed; we should all admit what God Himself has proclaimed, that ***“All have sinned”*** (Rom 3:23).

Yet as for Israel during the Old Testament period, hope was offered to lepers for cleansing and restoration into the blessings of God; so there is opportunity for our reconciliation to God, if we are willing to receive His remedy to deal with our sin.

For He hath made Him to be sin for us...

What the Old Testament sacrifices of Israel could not achieve, Christ Jesus has accomplished by His death on the cross. While we may have some appreciation of His physical sufferings as graphically portrayed to us in specific Psalms and the Gospel records, could we even begin to fathom the depths of His suffering during those three hours of darkness from midday which terminated with His cry ***“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”*** (Psa. 22:1). Some of the sin offerings of old were burnt fiercely to ashes outside the camp where the lepers resided, and it was metaphorically here that the blessed Christ experienced the fierceness of God’s wrath as He made Himself answerable for **SIN**. Jeremiah could speak of Jerusalem’s troubles in her affliction, but how well his words describe God’s holy sufferer: ***“Is is nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger. From above hath He sent fire into My bones...”*** (Lam. 1:12,13). Is it any wonder that His soul was troubled in Gethsemane!

Who knew no sin...

We should bow our heads as we consider the character of Him who died on that cross. Christ descended to address that which He most hated, something far more invasive than any disease. We are sure that sin was repulsive to Him as it was written concerning Him ***“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity”*** (Psa. 45:7; Heb. 1:9); what forbearance He showed daily as He witnessed around Him defilement of every sort. He remained totally separated and devoted to God the Father, against all the political, social and spiritual scheming and disorder amongst the leaders of the day. With compassion He touched lepers, the dead and those with running issues but was not defiled. While death had no claims on Him, on the eve of His death He could say, ***“the prince of the world cometh, and hath nothing in Me”*** (John 14:30); Satan could expose no micro flaw residing in the Christ of God.

That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him

God raised Christ from the dead, a Prince and a Saviour. He conquered the disease of sin, and Satan, mankind's adversary and taken the dread out of death for those who repent of their sins and believe upon Him. Christ did not become a sinner on the cross but suffered God's judgement against sin, ***“that we might be made the righteousness of God in HIM”***, to be fully reconciled and given a right standing with the God whom we have seriously offended, and so never suffer in Hell for our sins.

What a tremendous message this is in days of gloom and doom, a message of hope from Heaven itself – that we can be like and with Christ in the eternal day to come after we depart this world. We can fulfil our few final days on earth devoting sanctified bodies for God's glory. This is a far greater and more certain hope than any leper in Israel had. But remember, we need cleansing, for of that glorious place of God's habitation it is written, ***“there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth ... but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life”*** (Rev. 21:27).

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