

The Old Paths – January / March : 2017 – № 13

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And it was told Him *by certain* which said, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to see Thee. And He answered and said unto them, My mother and My brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.

(Luke 8:20,21)



From the Editor's Desk

“Give ye them to eat” (Matthew 14:16)

As the evening shadows gathered, the Lord was moved with compassion as He looked upon the hungry multitude in a desert place. “They were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). They were hungry, weary and had a long way to go. The disciples saw the crowd, they counted the cash and said, “Send them away” (Mark 6:36).

The Lord Jesus was perfect in His Person, His Pity and His Provision. In Him, every feature of His Holy Character is seen in perfect proportion. In Him we see that perfect blend of majesty which overawed every circumstance yet that perfect compassion and grace that met every need. No one feature of His blessed

character displaced another. All was manifest and perfectly blended in the only perfect Man this world has ever seen.

He said, "Give ye them to eat", and when they were filled He said, "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (John 6:12). He could not send away a hungry people without satisfying them fully. He would not allow a fragment of God's provision to be wasted. Benevolence and economy are seen in perfect proportion. That same hand that is still widely opened to meet our need is firmly closed against all carelessness and waste. There was nothing meagre in His bountiful supply yet there was nothing extravagant in His manner of providing for man's need. He was absolutely perfect in all that He said, did or gave. He was equally perfect in the administration of His provision.

All our brethren who seek to contribute to this magazine, conscious of our great limitations, seek with shepherd care to feed the people of God. We trust that those who received the magazine freely are careful and prayerful in their reading. It is a good economy having fed upon the scriptures yourself, that you pass the magazine on to others, that they also may partake from the basket.

The Lord said, "Feed My sheep" (John 21:17).

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THE FLOOD (3)

This present article seeks to look at the reasons for the Flood, and then to contrast those that went **in** and those that remained **outside** the Ark.

Reasons for the Flood. (Gen. 6:5-6, 11-13):

*** Human Depravity.**

These verses say it all – wickedness, evil, corruption and violence marked the Earth continually and completely. Depravity was inward, continual and habitual. There was utter corruption – in heart and in conduct. Man's thoughts and imaginations were completely out of line with the will and mind of God. God had commanded man to "*fill the Earth*" (Gen. 1:28 "replenish"= lit. "fill") – this he had done, but he had also "*filled it with violence*". God had told man the *way to walk*, but now all flesh had "*corrupted his way*". The Earth and its inhabitants were seemingly oblivious to God, yet God was still looking on the Earth (Heb. 4:13). Mankind had progressively degenerated since the introduction of sin and had lived as if God was irrelevant. Yet Noah and his family stood out as being different!

*** The Character of God.**

God is holy and righteous and cannot tolerate sin; He must uphold and vindicate His character, and so must judge sin. God saw man's sin as one *injured* and *wronged* by it. It was an affront to all that God was and is! Mankind then (as now) was not fulfilling its original function in relation to God, i.e. to obey, understand, love and commune with Him. In this pre-flood scene of increasing sinfulness and with the rumblings of Divine judgement fast approaching, God's longsuffering and love still shone through. This is seen in God providing a way of escape and in Him granting 120 years grace to mankind as the Ark was being built, giving more than adequate opportunity for any to accept God (2Pet. 3:9).

Parallels with Today.

There are many disturbing parallels and similarities between the world in Noah's day and our own generation! (Luke 17:26-27) – satisfying physical desires, materialistic attitudes, sick perversions, ungodly thinking and ungodly living, moral decay, widespread violence and corruption and the increasing rejection of the word of God (in Noah's day through the preaching of Noah himself). The Spirit of God continues to "*strive*" with people today as He did before the Flood – but this will soon come to an end!

Do men ever learn Lessons?

This picture of increasing sinfulness, Divine judgement and redemption is seen throughout God's word, not only in the Flood. Yet mankind seems determined to make the same mistake of leaving God out of their reckoning – remember the rich young farmer in Luke 12:16-21 who left God out of his life, but God never stayed out of his life!! Do men learn lessons from history? The overwhelming answer must be “**no**”. World War 1 was “the war to end all wars”, yet it was just the prelude to continual conflicts in the world ever since – man seemingly incapable of learning from his mistakes. Without God and without the knowledge and understanding of God's word (which records events like the Flood for our learning) man is doomed to ultimate Divine judgement, as in the days of Noah.

Those that went *into* the Ark. (Gen. 6:18).

Just eight persons out of the *entire* human population of the day were saved from the oncoming judgement. Here was a family group that stood-out as different, with Noah being prepared to *stand alone* with God, just as Enoch had done before him. Here was a world ripe for Divine judgement, but one of the lessons from Noah's life is that, despite increasing pressures and difficulties, it is *still possible* to live a life for God, to be right with God, to walk with God and to be *relatively* undefiled in a world of rampant sinfulness.

The same God that Noah and Enoch walked with righteously in fellowship and communion (Gen. 5:24 & 6:9) is the same God that we have dealings with today. It is *still possible* to be something for God in a defiled world about us – not only Enoch and Noah, but others have done it. In Romans 16:1-2 Paul commends Phebe (lit. “shining”; “pure”) who lived in Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, about 7 miles from the city itself. Cenchrea was a known cesspool of iniquity, but here indeed was purity amidst impurity. We can, *and should*, stand-out as morally different in our day and generation.

The Faithfulness of Noah.

Noah's faithfulness affected his family. What we are for God –whether good or bad – *can* have an affect on our family. In Genesis 5:21-24 we read of Enoch walking with God *after* he begat Methuselah. I wonder if the birth of his son into such an ungodly world at that time had a salutary affect on Enoch. Did Enoch realise that the way he lived before God and before his family from now on could ultimately affect the way his children lived? Perhaps some Christian parents are reading this article and wondering what is the best that they can do for their children – perhaps providing a stable home, a good education, a loving relationship, etc. All these are commendable in themselves, but none reach the spiritual “heights” of parents in touch *with* and living their lives *before* God, like Enoch and like Noah!

Those that remained *outside* the Ark.

Because Noah was a man of God he valued God's presence and implicitly obeyed God's word. Noah realised that God Himself would be with him inside the Ark (“Come ... into the Ark”; Gen. 7:1). Noah and his family were shut in with God, while the Flood destroyed all that were outside. The population of Noah's day (like the majority of people today) lived as if God didn't exist, and if He did exist then they couldn't care anyway! Without a *personal* relationship with their Creator, they knew no *absolute* values of morality and were out of touch with the mind and will of God. They turned after wickedness in their own hearts, and when confronted by a man who spoke for God, they simply did *not* recognise the hand of God in it all.

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Doves' Eyes

The dove is used several times in the Bible as a figure both of Christ and of the believer. As it is such an inoffensive creature it represents very well the qualities of meekness, humility and sincerity which are found in their perfection in the Person of Christ, and which should be found in the Christian as well.

Doves' eyes are beautiful, and in some species are surrounded by a clear blue marking. It is said that the

dove's binocular vision is so limited in its range that it can only focus on one object at a time. This speaks of devotion as it looks at its partner. The believer fixes his eyes on Christ alone, as the psalmist says, "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters ... so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God" (Psalm 123:2). We should be always "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

On the other hand, the dove's peripheral vision is very good and takes in everything that goes on around it. While we fix our eyes on Christ, we must also be aware both of the dangers and of the opportunities on every side.

In the Song of Solomon this figure is used both of the bridegroom's eyes (5:12) and the bride's (1:15; 4:1). First let us think of ...

THE EYES OF CHRIST

In the Song the figure of the dove has more to do with the beauty of the bride. He describes her as "my dove" in 2:14; 5:2; and 6:9. Therefore, when she describes his eyes as "doves' eyes", it seems that she sees in him one who shares the same nature. When he looked at her she did not feel intimidated, but was attracted by his meekness and affection. In the same way, to His people, the Lord is always approachable. His eyes say to us, "Come unto Me ... for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:28-29).

However, in the light of the New Testament, "doves' eyes" can mean much more with respect to the Lord Jesus. It is a remarkable fact that, while the Old Testament speaks of several creatures – ox, sheep, goat, doves and pigeons, etc., as sacrifices according to the law, the New Testament only uses one to speak of the sacrifice of Christ – the lamb. Although birds such as turtledoves and young pigeons were permitted as sacrifices in the law (see Leviticus 1:14; 12:8), the dove is only used in the New Testament as a figure or emblem of the Holy Spirit, and is the only creature used in this way. After the baptism of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit "descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him" (Luke 3:22).

Thinking of the vision of Christ as the Lamb, in Revelation 5, it is interesting to notice His seven eyes, and the explanation that the seven eyes are "the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" (Revelation 5:6). These seven Spirits are seven aspects or manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 11:2 speaks of the Spirit who would rest upon the Messiah as "the Spirit (1) of the LORD ... the Spirit of (2) wisdom and (3) understanding, the Spirit of (4) counsel and (5) might, the Spirit of (6) knowledge and of (7) the fear of the LORD". Gathering together these references, we can understand that the Son of God has the same perception as the Spirit of God, that His eyes are as the eyes of the celestial Dove who anointed Him and filled His life. Therefore, in describing the Beloved the bride states, "His eyes are as the eyes of doves" (Song of Solomon 5:12).

In this reference from the Song of Solomon, the bride adds: "... by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set". "The rivers of waters" suggests again a link with the Holy Spirit. In the Bible the symbol of water can be understood in two ways. Still water, in a vessel or as in the laver of the tabernacle, represents the word of God. Running water, however, speaks of the Spirit of God and of the living waters of eternal life which flow from the Spirit. Therefore, the Bridegroom's vision and perception is the result of His close relationship with the Holy Spirit – "by the rivers of waters". "Washed with milk" suggests the constant influence of the purity of God's word (1 Peter 2:2). "Fitly set" suggests that His eyes are like precious stones reflecting the glory of heaven. Several times we read of the Lord Jesus "lifting up His eyes to heaven" in prayer (Matthew 14:19; John 17:1).

The eyes of the Lord Jesus are often mentioned in the Gospels. For example, in Mark we read several times of how He looked round about upon those He addressed. In Mark 3:5 He looks round about with indignation because of the hardness and hypocrisy of the Jews. In 3:34 He looks round about with approval and love upon those who desired to do the will of God. In 5:32 He looks around with compassion to see the person who had just touched His garment. In 10:23 He looks around as the great Teacher wanting His disciples to understand the truth of salvation. And then in 11:11 He looks round about as Judge to see all that was being done in His Father's house – the temple in Jerusalem. Meditating on these and other passages we can appreciate something of the beauty of our beloved Saviour's eyes.

THE EYES OF HIS DOVE

WE have already noticed how the bridegroom refers to his bride as “my dove” (Song 2:14; 5:2; 6:9). The spiritual significance of this is that everything in the believer which gives pleasure to the Lord comes from the Holy Spirit. We should live in the Spirit, walk according to the Spirit, and be filled with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25; Romans 8:4; Ephesians 5:18), in order to produce the maximum of the fruit of the Spirit and give joy to the heart of our Bridegroom.

The bridegroom finds pleasure especially in the eyes of his dove. In Song 1:15 and 4:1, her dovelike eyes are the aspect of her beauty which he most appreciates. In 1:15 it is the only attribute which he mentions specifically as he speaks of her beauty. In 4:1 her eyes are mentioned in first place among her other characteristics. Once again there is a spiritual parallel with the believer in Christ. To look with the eyes speaks especially of trust and dependence.

In 2Chronicles 20:12, king Jehoshaphat says in his prayer, “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither do we know what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee”, and Psalm 121:1.2 says, “I will lift up mine eyes ... My help cometh from the LORD”. Also our eyes show what is our attitude and expectation, our discernment and our admiration. In Psalm 119 the psalmist speaks six times of his eyes, and in this we have a portrait of that beauty of the eyes which is so pleasing to the heart of our heavenly Bridegroom.

V. 18. “Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law”. The Lord is not interested in the colour of our eyes, but He appreciates the beauty of those eyes which contemplate the wonderful things of the Lord revealed in His word.

V. 37. “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity”. The Lord appreciates the beauty of the eyes of those who do not want to contemplate the empty and vain things under the sun, but value the reality of eternal and heavenly things.

V. 82. “Mine eyes fail for Thy word ... When wilt Thou comfort me?” The Lord approves of those eyes which long for the fulfilment of His promise, and do not seek comfort anywhere else.

V. 123. “Mine eyes fail for Thy salvation, and for the word of Thy righteousness”. The Lord takes pleasure in the eyes of those who have sought salvation and justification by faith, according to His word.

V. 136. “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law”. The eyes of those “that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done” here on earth (Ezekiel 9:4) are most precious to the Lord.

V. 148. “Mine eyes prevent (anticipate) the night watches, that I might meditate in Thy word”. To the Lord, those eyes are beautiful which make use of every moment of the day to meditate in His word. How important it is to saturate our minds with God’s word while we still have the mental and physical faculties to do so. Some have put off studying the word until retirement only to find that the “night watches” have already come.

When the Lord returns, we shall see Him as He is and we shall be like Him (1John 3:2). But the Lord wants to behold the beauty of our eyes even now. May we occupy our hearts and minds with His word and His will, which will transform all our attitudes and expectations. Then He will be able to say to us, with joy and delight, “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes!” (Song of Solomon 4:9).

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 4:13-22

The problem posed by the preachers (v.13)

Peter concluded his address to the Sanhedrin with that well known text, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”, (Acts 4:12). He spoke with confidence and forthrightness, being influenced by the Holy Spirit. The court was astonished by their “boldness”, which does not mean bravery but the clarity of their statements.

What impressed the Sanhedrin was the fact that Peter and John were “ignorant”, that is they were ‘unlettered’ or without technical training in the professional rabbinical schools. They did not have the academic qualifications or accredited status that these superior intellectuals would have expected in those who spoke so well. Indeed the lack of such natural advantages displayed the Holy Spirit’s power more conspicuously. So this Jewish religious court “marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

They would easily recall how the One they knew as Jesus of Nazareth taught in a way well beyond the abilities of those who had received a rabbinical education (Jn. 7:15). Now they were seeing similar features in the words of Peter and John. They had thought by killing the Lord Jesus Christ that they had rid themselves of Him. Now they see His teaching is being continued by His Spirit-filled disciples. Those who had rejected the witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, now have the Holy Spirit as their last witness.

We value today the helps to our understanding of Scripture provided by spiritual men with expert knowledge of the text in the original languages. But that does not mean that believers generally, or aspiring preachers in particular, require some course of academic training. The secret of spiritual power is still to be found in the regular study of - and meditation upon - Scripture, daily communion with the Lord Jesus, submission to His Lordship, purity of life and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. A “good degree” in the spiritual sense of 1Timothy 3:13 is to be preferred to an academic output more likely to encourage superiority than spirituality. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Tim. 2:15). This will require our diligent consideration of the word of God, which will claim time and energy and sacrifice from other, even legitimate, things.

However, the problem posed to the Sanhedrin here is whether to accept what the preachers taught as being true; or reject it. Their future actions will be determined by what they think about “Jesus Christ of Nazareth”.

The problem posed by the healed man (v.14)

The issue here centres on a man who had never walked in his life, who unaided had entered the temple, and is now standing, with Peter and John, in the presence of the High Priest and Sanhedrin. Those who did not believe in bodily resurrection now have an immediate problem explaining this power, which continues that displayed in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. They cannot deny the reality of the change, but they would not acknowledge its source. Everyone in Jerusalem would know about this healing, would realise that its results were good, but the Sanhedrin continued in blind unbelief.

The healed man was probably similarly arrested and held overnight in custody as he was so closely linked to Peter and John in their service and suffering. There is often a real cost involved in conversion. But like all who are truly saved he would never think of going back to his former state! He is standing like a new man, evidencing resurrection power. He has a new walk to take and a new life to live. But the religious leaders, who should have been pleased, were very disturbed and unhappy. We should not be surprised when we encounter such an attitude today.

The problem pondered in private (v.15-17)

The preaching and the healing present a problem: namely what are they going to do? It is amazing to

consider the highest religious court in Jerusalem going into a closed session, in privacy, to seek some way to save face and avoid the truth and its implications. They could not deny the stubborn facts before them. Nor did they seek to avoid the issue. It was too clear; the healed man presented an unassailable fact, the implications of which challenged their position. They recognised their uncomfortable dilemma, which brought them to again face the question of the source of this power and their position in relation to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel message always brings its hearers to a choice in relation to this blessed Person:

“What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be,
Some day your soul will be asking,
What will He do with me”?

But private conversations are never contained for long! This one is also soon exposed. Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles may have later received information about this closed session directly from Paul, or from Gamaliel via Paul. Whatever the human agency, this disclosure was superintended by the Holy Spirit and is recorded in Scripture as a result of divine inspiration. “For there is nothing hid, which shall not be made manifest; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad” (Mk. 4:22).

The outcome of the Sanhedrin’s private meeting ignores the implications of the facts before them. It therefore becomes a public relations exercise. Their opposition however is clear from their deliberate avoidance of the personal name of the Lord Jesus Christ: they allude to Him by “this name”. They had no answer to, and made no attempt to discredit, the Apostles’ witness to the resurrection, which was the heart of their preaching. Nevertheless they were deeply unhappy men. They did not wish that news should spread about miracles being done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. They had no wish that the Gospel message should spread, including its assertion of resurrection. Their intention was to create the conditions whereby this recent ‘excitement’ would die down of its own accord and disappear. Their hope of achieving this lay in their threat to Peter and John (and probably also the healed man) that “they speak henceforth to no man in this name”. But they had underestimated the calibre of the Apostles!

The problem does not go away (v.18-22)

The Sanhedrin now reconvenes in open, public session with the intention of brow-beating the Apostles into submission with severe threats. A legal admonition is given before witnesses; in effect a formal caution with force of law. So having called Peter and John (and possibly the healed man) they are “commanded ... not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” They are to give up such preaching and obey the authorities to preserve the existing social, political and religious order.

Any hope for mild compliance was quickly shattered. Until this point Peter had been the spokesman, but now John also adds his voice, making a counter charge to that of the Sanhedrin: “whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” The crux of Peter and John’s response relates to whether the rulers preferred their own judgments, or God’s? They stand resolute by what is the right thing to do. If it is right to preach and teach in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ then threats will not avail. It was either obey the Sanhedrin; or obey the Great Commission, (Matt. 28:18-20). Implicit in their united stand is a challenge to the Sanhedrin to honestly face facts, reconsider and repent. The Sanhedrin is therefore put on trial, this court must judge what is right. So for us today, our first consideration must be to establish what God’s word says and do what is right.

It must have been deeply disappointing for this court to hear the response, “for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” If the testimony of God was right then it was wrong to submit to contrary instructions. Indeed it was incumbent upon them to preach: in essence we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard! Later Peter will say “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

There is, perhaps, a need to digress here. It should be made clear that Christians should be the most law abiding, honest and honourable people in any society. Our proper attitude to the civil power is described in

Romans 13:1-7. Also, Gospel witness requires the adoption of a prayerful, courteous, faithful and spiritual attitude on the part of those who preach and teach. We are all aware of instances where the spread of the gospel has been hindered by what can only be described as a fleshly natural aggression and an overtly confrontational attitude. But, like Peter and John, there will be instances where obedience to God's word may require us to take a different position to that which is being enforced. In such an exceptional case we may have to submit to the legal penalty, always remembering the injunction: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1).

However returning to the passage before us, we should note that additional threatening is a sign of weakness and ill will, rather than power which can forbear until the critical moment. As the rulers could not find a pretext on which to punish them, Peter and John and the man who was healed, were released "because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done." Sadly the rulers feared the people, not God. The people who were praising God for what had happened to a man disabled for over 40 years. This is similar to the radical transforming change which salvation brings today. Indeed, if salvation doesn't change the life, it is questionable if the soul has been saved at all!

We do well to note that the fundamental aim of all Christian life and service is still to bring glory to God alone.

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THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Paper 5 – THE PRIVILEGE : FELLOWSHIP

In the previous Issue, we considered the clear scriptural requirements for reception to the assembly. In this Paper we shall consider the Privilege of assembly fellowship.

There are 5 types of Fellowship in the New Testament:

1. SPIRITUAL. "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1John 1:3). "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1John 1:7). This is the fellowship we all enjoy as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We no longer habitually walk in darkness but in the light. It is family fellowship. We share the same eternal life with all who are saved. We entered this fellowship by Grace alone when we were born again.

2. SOCIAL. "Breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). "When he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them" (Acts 16:34). "What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in" (1Cor. 11:22). This is partaking of food as going to each other's house to partake of a meal. This is not any assembly meeting. In days of great persecution and need, saints who had homes and food made the homeless and outcast believers welcome and showed social hospitality to fellow believers.

3. SERVICE. "Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now" (Phil. 1:4,5). Paul rejoiced that the believers at Philippi were labourers together with him in the Gospel.

4. PRACTICAL. "Ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only" (Phil. 4:14-15). This is the great privilege of having material fellowship with the Gospel and the servants of God.

5. ASSEMBLY. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). This is the fellowship of local believers, known to each other and the elders who meet regularly gathered to the Lord’s Name. This is not a social breaking of bread. It is the fellowship which is expressed in the partaking of one bread and one cup as instituted by the Lord Himself in (1Cor. 11:24-25). As each one partakes of the emblems he or she expresses that they are in fellowship with every other believer who have partaken of the bread and the cup. It is an expression of oneness at the Lord’s Supper. “I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (1Cor. 10:20-21).

Assembly fellowship brings privileges but also responsibilities. All our Gospel work should be in fellowship with the assembly seeking to see others saved, baptised and added to the assembly. This fellowship is not just expressed each Lord’s Day. During weekdays we also bear testimony as being in the fellowship of the local assembly. We express this fellowship by regular attendance and participation in the meetings which are spiritual exercises and expression of the communion of the saints.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2Cor. 6:14). An assembly believer has no common commitment with a person who is a Christ rejecter. “What fellowship hath unrighteousness with unrighteousness” With the world, we have no partnership in business, no participation in politics, we are out of tune with its pleasures, we do not have any part in marriage with an unbeliever and we have no agreement with its religion. “What part hath he that believeth with an infidel” (2Cor. 6:15). This means that they do not share the same interests, they do not share the same portion, they do not share the same dish. Being in the happy fellowship of a scripturally called out assembly of the Lord’s people, means that I cannot enjoy fellowship with man made organisations or sectarian interdenominationalism. We do not require fellowship with human organisations of men. Assembly fellowship enjoys the sovereign rights of the Lordship and Headship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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MISINTERPRETED TEXTS

Deut. 29:29 – “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God ...”

This verse often suffers from serious misinterpretation. Some say that there are parts of the scriptures that are so profound that we cannot understand them even though we are indwelt and taught by the Holy Spirit.

Often it is cited as if it meant that there are parts of the Word of God we should not study. They say that the deep things of God and His great mysteries in His Word are better not investigated. The constant misuse of this passage hinders believers from progressing in divine things. It is discouraging to tell a believer who cannot understand some deep and profound scripture to give up and leave it until all is explained in eternity. The verse actually teaches the very opposite from that which many would make it to mean. The verse continues; “Those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever”.

Perhaps what has added to the misunderstanding of the verse is the fact that the AV has added in italics the words “things” and “belong”. Omitting these words, the translation becomes “The secret things of the Lord our God, even the revealed things (belong) to us and to our children forever that we may do all the words of this law”. This means that both the secret things and the revealed things belong unto us. The verse is not saying that God withholds from us His secrets and only condescends to communicate to us certain things.

In the context the secret things have to do with God’s dealings in grace with Israel. In spite of their disobedience His desire was to recover and bless His people. These wondrous purposes of grace to Israel

are the subject of the remaining chapters in Deuteronomy. God will have sovereign mercy upon His repentant people. He will be gracious to them by sending their Messiah.

We now have the New Testament scriptures in our possession. In the N.T. we have unfolded to us what was then hidden to Israel at the time Moses wrote these words. Thus God would have us enter into these things. He has been pleased to reveal them to us in His Word so that we may be enlightened and profited thereby (1Peter 1:10-11). All this with the practical end in view that we may be obedient to His Word. Please do not teach from Deuteronomy 29:29 that there are secrets in the Word of God that must be left alone.

We as believers have received the Holy Spirit of God that through His help “We might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1Cor. 2:12). God does not wish us to remain ignorant of His will and purpose. He has shared His secrets with us. He would have us enter prayerfully with intelligence and appreciation into His eternal counsels. This we can do through the gracious enabling of the Spirit of God and though the full revelation that God has given through His Son in the Holy Scriptures.

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The Church of God and the Church which is His Body

Some parallels in comparison and contrast of the character of the Church of God (1Cor. 1:2) and the Church which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23)

The Church of God The Churches (1Cor. 7:17; 11:16)	The Church which is His Body The Church (Col. 1:18)
Comparison <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Called out unto Him (Heb. 13:13) • Lord’s Teaching (Matt. 18:20) • Body (1Cor. 12:27) • Chaste Virgin (2Cor. 11:2) • Building (1Cor. 3:9) • Purchased with Blood (Acts 20:28) • Foundation – Christ (1Cor. 3:11) • No central oversight – Christ is Head (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16; Heb. 13:17) <p>The Assembly is also likened to a House (1Tim. 3:15), Temple (1Cor. 3:16), Letter (2Cor. 3:2), Field (1Cor. 3:9), Flock (1Pet. 5:2), Lampstand (Rev. 1:20) and Pillar (1Tim. 3:15)</p>	Comparison <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Called out from the world (Gal. 1:4) • Lord’s Teaching (Matt. 16:18) • Body (Eph. 1:22-23) • Bride (Eph. 5:25-27,32; Rev. 21:9) • Building (Matt. 16:18) • Purchased with Blood (Eph. 5:23,25) • Foundation – Christ (Matt. 16:18) • No central oversight – Christ is Head (Eph. 5:23)
Contrast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An assembly of professing believers gathered in a locality unto the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 13:1; Mt. 18:20) • Enter on Reception (Acts 18:27; 15:4) • Excommunication possible (1Cor. 5:4-5) • Gender distinction commanded (1Cor. 14:34-35; 1Tim. 2:9-15) • Baptised in water by man (Acts 2:41; 8:38) • Water Baptism required for inclusion (Acts 2:41) • Possible for unsaved to be part of it through deceiving the brethren (Acts 20:29) • Led by Overseers (Acts 20:17,28) 	Contrast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All believers throughout church period (Eph. 5:27; 1Cor. 12:12; Heb. 12:23) • Enter on Salvation (Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 1:18-23) • No excommunication possible (Matt. 16:18) • No gender distinctions (Gal. 3:28) • Baptised by the Lord Jesus in the Holy Spirit (John 1:33; 1Cor. 12:13) • Water Baptism not required for inclusion (Eph. 2:8) • Impossible for unsaved to be part of it (Eph. 5:26-27) • No Overseers

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Get to Know Your Bible

OLD TESTAMENT OUTLINE

The Prophetical Books

These 17 are divided into 5 books and 12 books. The first 5 books speak of Christ coming as King – **Isaiah** 11:1,10; 24:23; 32:1 “A King shall reign in righteousness”. **Jeremiah** 23 gives us the same thought and tells us how God will install this King and how He shall reign. **Ezekiel** tells us that the temple of God shall be built (Ezekiel 40-42) – the Lord is going to reign in Jerusalem and its Name shall be called Jehovah Shamah (Ezekiel 48:35). **Daniel** tells us that unto the Messiah Prince will be 70 prophetic weeks (weeks of years) – we are living between the 69th and 70th week (Daniel 9:24-27) – God is not dealing with Daniel’s people today but through the Gospel is forming the Church which is the body of Christ – when the Church has been removed from the world God will begin dealing again with Daniel’s people (Israel) and at the end of the 70th week Christ will return to the earth as the glorious King and set up the kingdom as in Daniel 2:34-35,44-45; 7:13-14,27. They all focus upon this one glorious point – the coming of the Messiah King. The little book of **Lamentations** is joined to Jeremiah and is an acrostic book – arranged according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet each verse beginning with the respective Hebrew letter of the Alphabet. It is a lament for Israel’s sin – repentance which is necessary to enter into the kingdom of the true King of Israel.

The 12 so called Minor Prophets have the same goal before them and they all speak of the coming reign of the Lord Jesus when He shall have His throne in Jerusalem. **Hosea** says in chapter 1:11 that Judah and Israel shall be gathered together and appoint themselves One Head; in chapter 2:23 he tells us that they shall say “Thou art my God”; in chapter 3:4-5 he speaks of many years and then they shall seek David their King; and in chapter 13:10 he mentions God as their King. **Joel** tells us of the great and notable day of the Lord when the Lord shall be in the midst of Israel (Joel 2:26-27). **Amos** tells us that God will raise up again the tabernacle of David and that there will be an abundance of blessing (Amos 9:11-15). **Obadiah** speaks of the same blessing (vv 17,21). **Micah** tells us in chapter 4:7-8 that the Lord will reign over Israel and that the kingdom shall come to them. In chapter 7:14-20 he tells us of God having compassion on Israel and that Israel will be abundantly blessed.

Nahum 1:15 tells us of the feet of the Lord upon the mountains bringing them good tidings. **Habakkuk** 3 tells us of the coming of God in judgement, of His salvation and of Israel walking in the high places (Habakkuk being a representative of Israel). In **Zephaniah** 3 we are told of the day when the Lord, the King of Israel who is just and mighty shall be in the midst of Israel (vv 5,15,17). **Haggai** 2:20-23 tells of when God will shake the heavens and the earth and overthrow the throne of the kingdoms to set up His kingdom. **Zechariah** 6:13 tells us that the temple of the Lord shall be built and that He shall sit and rule upon His throne – he also tells us that the Lord shall be King over all the earth and that all shall go up to Jerusalem to worship the King (Zechariah 14:9,16-17). **Malachi** 3:1-3 tells us that the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple to purify – in chapter 4:2-3 he tells us the Lord shall come as the Sun of righteousness. Thus all these books have a glorious message for Israel. But have they no message for us? – Yes, there are practical lessons for us in these prophetical books.

Isaiah tells us about the great truth of reconciliation – Isaiah is a prophet of peace – in order to be at peace with God we need to be reconciled. The Lord is the Prince of peace (Ch. 9:6); He will ordain peace for us (Ch. 26:12); by taking hold upon Him there is peace (Ch. 27:5); the work of righteousness brings peace (Ch. 32:17); the chastisement of our peace was upon Him (Ch. 53:5) – see also Isaiah 26:3; 52:7; 55:12; 57:19; 60:17 and 66:12.

Jeremiah tells us of the great truth of justification – that the Lord liveth in righteousness (Ch. 4:2); that He

exercises righteousness because He delights in it (Ch. 9:24); of the Lord being their righteousness (Ch. 23:6); of Lord being the Branch of righteousness (Ch. 33:15-16); and in chapter 51:10 of the Lord bringing forth their righteousness. Thus Jeremiah is the prophet of justification telling of the Lord Jesus who justifies sinners.

Lamentations tells us of the need of repentance – the need for contrition for all that grieves the Lord. Thus Lamentations would teach us of the need of repentance to enjoy the blessings of God – the need to rectify in our lives all that is contrary to the will and word of God in order to enjoy fellowship with Him.

Ezekiel is the prophet of the new birth – he tells us that God will put a new spirit within (Ch. 11:19); he speaks of a new heart and a new spirit in chapter 18:31; he tells us that God declares “I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ch. 36:26); and he tells us of life being given to the dead – dry bones (Ch. 37). Ezekiel then tells us that although we are dead in our sins God can make us a new creation – a new creation in Christ.

Daniel is the prophet of sanctification – he speaks of a holy people (Ch. 8:24; 12:7); a holy mountain (Ch. 9:16,20; 11:45), a holy city (Ch. 9:24) and a holy covenant (Ch. 11:28-30). He tells of those who will be purified and made white (Ch. 11:35; 12:10). Thus Daniel tells of how God will sanctify His people and bring them again into fellowship with Himself in the sanctuary. Thus we have the great truths of Reconciliation, Justification, Regeneration and Sanctification brought before us as well as the need for Repentance.

Hosea is the book of fruitfulness – he speaks of Israel being barren because of her sins and exhorts them to repent. He says in chapter 2:14-23 “I will allure her... into the wilderness... I will give her... the valley of Achor...” – in Joshua’s day the valley of Achor was where they purged away the sin of Achan and became triumphant again – so Israel will have her sins purged away and become fruitful. They shall turn from idols and become fruitful (Ch. 14:8) – see also Hosea 9:16; 10:1; 13:13-15. As Hosea speaks of Israel repenting in a coming day and becoming fruitful we learn that if we, as His people today, repent of our sin, if we are contrite for all that grieves the Lord so we will become fruitful and be in the enjoyment of the Spirit's anointing.

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“PAUL’S METAPHORS”

(6) THE AMBASSADOR : AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

“We preach Christ crucified” (1Cor. 1:23). “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the (as) Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2Cor. 4:5). Those who carry the glorious message of Christ crucified (1Cor.) and Christ glorified (2Cor.) are defined by the apostle Paul as ambassadors. “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2Cor. 5:20).

An Ambassador is a representative living abroad promoting the interests of his or her homeland. While absent from home it is the responsibility of the Ambassador to bear the dignity and honour of representing his or her country in a foreign land. The reception of the Ambassador will depend on whether that land is friendly or hostile toward his or her fatherland. The Ambassador will be granted diplomatic immunity but must not while in a foreign land, interfere in its internal politics, marry one of its subjects or practice its religion.

The dignity of the Ministry of Reconciliation to which we are called (2Cor. 4:6-5:21) is seen in the radiance which comes from God Himself. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined

in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2Cor. 4:6). The seals of office are bestowed upon the Ambassador by the highest authority of his sovereign state. God alone, is the Originator of this illumination, this penetrating light, the revelation of the Father in the Son, the full revelation of true knowledge in the Person and Presence of Jesus Christ.

The apostle uses this investiture as the clinching reason why there is no room for pride or self esteem. "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2Cor. 4:7). We have considered the Body and its activities in Paper 5 of this series. Here we have the great mystery of the Gospel, the greatest message in the weakest vessel, the body likened unto an earthenware vase. Human weakness presents no barrier to the purposes of God. It is more important that this vessel be *clean* then *clever*.

1) THE MERITS OF THE AMBASSADOR: FOUND 'IN' CHRIST. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Cor. 5:17). The first credentials are what we obtain in Christ at conversion which is manifest in a new nature, new love and new desires as we now represent a new Master and a new Homeland. We rejoice that Heaven is our Fatherland but it has pleased Him to leave us down here, strangers away from home, pilgrims going home, we no longer have citizenship down here. It is sad if we live our lives as earth dwellers.

2) THE MANNERS OF THE AMBASSADOR: ABSENT "FROM" THE LORD. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" (2Cor. 5:6). We are absent from the Lord but as representing His interests down here we will discover that as He was hated so we shall bear reproach. If an Ambassador of the Indian Government is sent to the USA or China, he does not become a citizen of the USA or China. The Ambassadors language, customs, food and way of living will be in keeping with his standing, status and state. At any formal or civic function it will be obvious by his dress what country he represents. The following chapter, (2Cor. 6:14-16), shows that the believer should be separate from the world: the 'unrighteousness' of its commercial corruption; the 'darkness' of its political crisis; the 'Belial' of its material conflicts; the 'infidel' (unbeliever) and his moral chaos; the 'idols' of the world's religious confusion.

"We're not of the world that fadeth away,
We're not of the night but children of day,
The chains that once bound us by Jesus are riven,
We're strangers on earth and our home is in Heaven".

3) THE MOTIVE OF THE AMBASSADOR: ACCEPTED "OF" CHRIST. "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him" (2Cor. 5:9). The Ambassador representing his country among a foreign people, will share the esteem or hatred of his homeland. We are in a very hostile environment, governed by the god of this world, controlled by the powers of darkness. Its principles are evil, its practices are sinful and its propaganda is vehemently opposed to the Kingdom we represent. It is not for us to accommodate, compromise or try to fit in with such an environment but set our sights with singleness of eye to please Him Who hath called us out of such darkness into His marvellous light.

4) THE MISSION OF THE AMBASSADOR: LIVE "UNTO" CHRIST. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but *unto* Him which died for them, and rose again" (2Cor. 5:14-15). The Ambassador and his embassy is part of his own country located in a foreign country. His sole function is to represent the interests of his sovereign state and fellow citizens for the entire duration of stay in that country until recalled home. Our service is with single eye to the Glory of our risen Lord.

5) THE MINISTRY OF THE AMBASSADOR: CONVEYED "THROUGH" CHRIST. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by (through) Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2Cor. 5:18). If the Ambassador is to convey messages he must know the mind of his sovereign state. He must keep in constant contact with home, the lines of communication must always be kept open so that there is no confusion or uncertainty as to the position of the government he represents on any given matter. We serve through Christ to convey His Wishes, His Will and His Word. The misconceptions, prejudices and

enslavements of our former unregenerate life are not to be brought over into the dignified ministry committed unto us. The work we do is to please Him, not others. The words we express have the authority of His commands. The will which we express has the authority of His Throne behind it.

6) THE MESSAGE OF THE AMBASSADOR: *CARRIED "FOR" CHRIST*. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2Cor. 5:20). The Ambassador may be sent to a friendly country and the execution of the diplomatic office will be a formality. On the contrary, we have to convey the message of reconciliation to a hostile world. We confront the powers of darkness, we face the enmity of the wicked, we represent God in a scene of rebellion. We carry the message of reconciliation, that there is an offer of the removal of God's anger against sin through Jesus Christ. As representatives commissioned and sent by God, the urgent Gospel message to sinners is to accept the reconciliation offered as an answer to man's mutiny, enmity and rebellion so that conditions of peace can be enjoyed.

7) THE MANIFESTATION OF THE AMBASSADOR: *APPEAR "BEFORE" CHRIST*. "For we must all appear (be made manifest) *before* the judgement seat of Christ" (2Cor. 5:10). When diplomacy between nations fails and open hostilities are about to break out, the first move by the sovereign government will be the recall of the Ambassador, the withdrawal of the Embassy Staff and the evacuation of nationals. Soon the Day of Grace will close but before the Great Day of His wrath is come, the servants will be called home at the Rapture and the mission of gathering from the Nations a people for His Name, will close. When the service is done, the Ambassadors will be recalled. As identified with Him down here, so faithfulness will be rewarded at the Judgement Seat to reflect His Glory up there.

8) THE MORTALITY OF THE AMBASSADOR: *PRESENT "WITH" THE LORD*. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2Cor. 5:1). "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present *with* the Lord" (2Cor. 5:8). When our temporary mortal service is complete we are assured of a mansion in keeping with the Service of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, eternal in nature, heavenly in sphere and present with the Lord. In the meantime as Ambassadors for Christ, we should keep in touch with Home.

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The Word of God

Its Work in the Soul

It is a Sword to Pierce	(Hebrews 4:12)
It is a Glass to Show	(James 1:23)
It is Seed to give Life	(1Peter 1:23)
It is Water to Cleanse	(Psalm 119:9)
It is a Lamp to give Light	(Psalm 119:130)

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The Servant of God

**“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”
(1Peter 4:11)**

THE PREACHER – His Preaching and Teaching

We have seen what the calibre and character, of a servant of God should be. His credibility, integrity and accountability, both before God and man makes up his stewardship responsibilities. For the very purpose and nature of his calling, he should develop into a good and effective preacher and a messenger of God. We may now look into some vital aspects that would make him a vessel God can use.

It is sad indeed, to note that most of the Christian congregations, whatever group, denomination or theology they belong to, are left empty and frustrated Sunday after Sunday. They feel void and unsatisfied, time and again by what the preacher preaches. People come, with eager and heartfelt expectation to hear a message from God, but instead they hear a man’s voice and human wisdom, week after week, and return home no better than how they came in.

The preacher must understand that his sermon and his preaching ought to be nothing but a public expression to meet the needs of the inner life of his congregation. Thus, sermon preparation is hard work. It is like birth pangs, as of a woman in her travail. There is no easy way or short cut to prepare a message and to preach it effectively. It will take long hours of deep and disciplined study, concentrated thought, spiritual agony, and waiting on God. It must be accomplished under the power of the Spirit, as it must feed the spiritual hunger of the hearers. Only such preaching would expose the hearers to the power of the Holy Spirit and would renew their lives. ***Preaching therefore, should be an event, man meeting God.*** It should be an awe-creating, awe-inspiring experience and should result in a renewed decision towards real commitment and action.

The Preacher and His Preaching

As is the preacher, so will his preaching be. He must possess the ability to edify and an aptness to teach. He must acquire sound judgement and solid experience with gentle manners and a loving attitude. He should manifest firmness and courage and yet must not lack tenderness and sympathy. He must be willing to sustain and persevere with patience. He has to take heed of himself (his personality, character and integrity), as well the sound doctrine (1Tim. 4:16). He should defend the faith and fight with the enemies of truth.

The preacher should not seek a self-identity of his own. His identity is His Lord, whom he serves and singularly rests in his divine calling and the authority vested in it. He only looks to others to determine who and what he is. His life should be open to all.

The Christian preacher is not a mini-theologian or an academic lecturer. His aim is not to impress his people with his knowledge or his presentation skills (1Cor. 2:2-5). He is to preach the word of God, to the glory of God, elevating Christ, giving no room for any form of self-glory.

True preaching is the proclamation of the Word of God. It is the ministry of the Word. It is much more than preaching. The preacher must help His people, enabling them to feed on the Word of God. It is a wholehearted, united exercise of all the members and a time when God’s people think and act together. It is a time of renewed commitment and fresh decision.

As an ambassador of Christ, the preacher is to be faithful. He is a servant to the Word and is subject to it. He has no personal word nor should he speak about himself (2Cor. 4:5). The word ‘*proclaiming*’ implies subjection to the higher authority that has commissioned him. He is expected to maintain a standard and

should speak as he “ought to speak” (Eph. 6:20). He has to speak boldly and authoritatively that which he has derived from a study of the Word of God.

The Word of God reveals the *active will* of God, and will meet any issues and problems prevalent among the members of the church. Thus, the preacher should strive to proclaim the Word in a way it can be received and accepted by the hearers. He should not compromise or twist it to please men, or use it for his own interests. It is not *what* is said, but *how* it is stated, that will make the difference. The faithful declaration of the all-sufficient Word has the power to overcome evil and bring peace, as it is uttered by the Spirit of God.

Whoever may be the audience of a preacher, whether they are the commonest and most simple minded of rural folks, or well educated and refined metro-dwellers, the Word must be proclaimed in its simplest form, presenting Christ and Him crucified, so that everyone may be touched.

If the preacher loses confidence in his preaching, then he loses confidence in God and in His Word. He must always look forward that the members of his congregation would become Christ-like, through the preaching of the Word. He must desire that his ministry should inspire his people grow to spiritually and be edified, with the mind of Christ. A congregation without a thriving awareness of spiritual growth is an orphaned family without the love and affection of a passionate and a caring mother. (1Thess. 2:7,8 – *Some translations in the Indian languages use ‘mother’ instead of ‘nurse’.*)

Preaching is not optional in today’s church life. Without preaching, God is not communicating to His people. Any other mode or method is secondary and may not have His approval.

All this is easier said than done, or achieved.

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The Landmarks of Divine Order

“For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (Colossians 2:5).

God is a God of order. ‘Order and subordination pervade the whole universe.’ This is especially apparent in relation to “the house of God.” Paul corrected the major problems at Corinth in his first epistle but he wrote, “And the rest will I set in order when I come” (11:34). He wrote to Titus, “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest [further] set in order the things that are wanting ...” (1:5).

The order which characterises the churches of God is marked by three prominent features, the first two of which, are like the two pillars which dominated the approach to Solomon’s temple. These overriding characteristics are (i) the Supremacy of Christ, (ii) the Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and (iii) the Sufficiency and Authority of the Holy Scriptures in all matters of doctrine and practice. One further overriding feature is Simplicity.

The following list is an attempt to give a simple summary of important landmarks of Divine Order, which have acted as marks of identification in the past.

- (i). Gathered “in” or “into the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Cor. 5:4), in separation from all sectarian names and organisations of the world system of denominationalism.
- (ii). Baptism of believers and steadfast continuance in “the apostles’ doctrine and [the] fellowship, and in [the] breaking of bread, and in [the] prayers” (Acts 2:42). The apostles’ doctrine represents

acceptance of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and their authority in all matters of doctrine and practice. In the English speaking world, the King James Version has been used for public meetings.

- (iii). Recognition of the Headship and Lordship of Christ and the Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Headship is symbolised in the uncovered heads and short hair of men, the covered heads and long hair of women, and the silence of sisters. All believers in assembly fellowship are responsible to “come together into one place” and contribute in the exercise and development of spiritual gift – 1Corinthians 11-14.
- (iv). Holiness. The figure “temple of God” (1Corinthians 3:16,17), is used to describe the sanctity of the assembly as God’s dwelling place. Assembly discipline is exercised in order to preserve the presence of God in the midst of His people. When the tabernacle was God’s dwelling place, the enclosure of fine white linen curtains around the Sanctuary, created a first impression of the sanctity of God’s dwelling place, as it was approached.
- (v). Priesthood of all believers, exercised in worship and prayer (1Peter 2:5,9; Hebrews 13:13-16; Revelation 1:5b,6). There are no choirs or musical instruments. These belong to the Old Testament order. In the New Testament, they are conspicuous by their absence.
- (vi). Rule by a plurality of elders, who are also overseers and shepherds, responsible to take care of the church of God and for matters of order and discipline (Acts 20:17,28; 1Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
- (vii). Governmental autonomy. Each assembly is responsible to Christ as head over all things to the Church, in fellowship with “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (Revelation 2 and 3; 1Corinthians 1:2; 2Corinthians 1:1).
- (viii). Evangelism. When the early disciples lost their homes and livelihood and were scattered abroad from Jerusalem by persecution, they made it their business to spread the gospel, “preaching [‘speaking’] the word ...” (Acts 11:19-21). In this simple way the work of God made an important advance into Gentile territory. This must remain an important aspect of the evangelistic character of the assembly, as opportunities are given among relatives, neighbours and acquaintances. The testimony of the assembly at Thessalonica echoed and re-echoed throughout the region (1Thessalonians 1). If it is possible to maintain an open air witness in a local centre, it is surprising how many can be reached, including those outside the locality. This type of outreach, including sound, suitable gospel literature is essential, if souls are to be reached effectively. It seems that it was expected that “unbelievers” would come into assembly gatherings and this would provide an opportunity for them to be convinced of the truth (1Corinthians 14:23-25). The evangelist is a special gift. He is called to labour in the regions beyond where Christ has not been named.

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him” (Psalm 89:7). The language of the King James Version distinguishes between the singular “Thee”, “Thou” and “Thine” and plural pronouns, on over 14,000 occasions. It has been customary for this form of language to be used in addressing God, in worship and prayer. The reverent language and universally acknowledged, classical beauty, of this Version are no longer part of modern day language but accurately reflect grammatical precision and preserve a special form of address, which is in keeping with such an occasion. The King James Version was not the language of the day, when it was translated in the 16th and 17th century, but its pronouns ‘expresses a special relationship to human as well as Divine persons,’ following the normative practice in other languages and in civil life.

“The LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order” (1Chronicles 15:13).

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Discipleship

A THREEFOLD CONCEPTION

One conception of discipleship is that it is something less than salvation. Some think that all nominal Christians are disciples, even those who have never experienced the new birth. Doubtless the term “disciple” is used at times in Scripture to include all professed followers of Christ, even those who go on to prove by defection that they never had divine life. The supreme example of this is Judas Iscariot, but other less obvious cases might be mentioned (John 6:60-66; Acts 19:1). Also when the Lord addressed His disciples He often warned them directly or indirectly of the danger of false profession (Matt. 5:1,20-30; 18:1-9).

People are often described or addressed in Scripture according to their claim or profession (Matt. 18:15-17; 25:14-30; Luke 15:7; Heb. 6:4-8).

But when we note what the Lord laid down as the essential conditions of true discipleship (e.g. Luke 14:25-35) it is clear that only a truly saved soul can be a real disciple. A nominal Christian may be a nominal disciple but only a true Christian can be a true disciple.

A second conception of discipleship is that it is something more than salvation. Some think that simple faith in Christ is sufficient for salvation, but that only Christians who are committed to follow Christ are disciples. But true saving faith involves submission to Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9) and this is expressed in obedience (Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46; 13:25). Every true Christian is committed to Christ (2Tim. 1:12): Scripture knows no such thing as an uncommitted Christian. In Acts 11:26 we read, “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”, so unless a person is a disciple he (or she) cannot be called a Christian.

A third conception of discipleship, and in our judgement the correct one, is that discipleship is equivalent to salvation, that only those who are saved, but all those who are saved, are true disciples, true Christians. The verse just quoted (Acts 11:26) would surely indicate this, but it is also indicated by the terms of the new world-wide mission given by the Lord to His servants just before He returned to heaven. We observe that it was:

A THREEFOLD COMMISSION

He said, “All power (authority) is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Spirit): teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age)” (Matt. 28:18-20).

The first word rendered “teach” is quite different in the original Greek from that rendered “teaching”, and is the verb form of the noun “disciple”. It could more accurately be translated “disciple” or “make disciples of”. This is accomplished by the preaching of the gospel, and those who believe the gospel are constituted disciples. Compare Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46,47. So in this threefold commission we have:

- (1) Disciples made by the preaching of the gospel.
- (2) Disciples marked by the public confession of baptism (cf. John 4:1).
- (3) Disciples moulded by being taught the Lord’s commandments.

And this commission is to be fulfilled until “the end of the age”.

Some hyper-dispensationalists have made much of the fact that the term “disciple” does not occur in any of the New Testament epistles. They insist that it is not suitable for the present church age which commenced with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and that the “age” referred to in Mathew 28:20 is the brief transitional period before the church age began. We should, however, note the following points:

- (1) Although the term “disciple” (Greek *mathetes*) is not found in the epistles, the root word “*manthano*” from which it has sprung, meaning “to learn”, occurs some seventeen times in ten of the epistles, so clearly saints of the church age are still learners or disciples.
- (2) The word “disciple” is employed in the book of Acts some thirty times, and all except one of these occurrences refer to the followers of Christ after the day of Pentecost. So the term is quite suitable for saints of the church age in the mind of the Holy Spirit who inspired the book of Acts.
- (3) The commission was to reach out to “all nations”. To suppose that this could be accomplished in the few days before the day of Pentecost is absurd.
- (4) When the Lord entrusted His servants with this world-wide mission, He added, “And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49), so far from this mission ending on the day of Pentecost, it did not begin until then. It commenced on the day of Pentecost, continues throughout this present age and will conclude at the coming again of Christ.

But what exactly is discipleship? The Scripture teaches that it is a relationship with:

A THREEFOLD CHARACTER

1. Learning from a Teacher.

The Greek word for disciple is “*mathetes*”, which is derived from the verb “*manthano*”, to learn. It denotes a learner. The disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ are men and women who are prepared to accept the teachings of Christ. They believe His word, and receive it as the truth in the confidence that He came from God and spoke the words of God. Even a child can be a disciple of Christ (Matt. 10:42), in fact a humble childlike spirit is essential to discipleship.

2. Obeying a Master.

A disciple does not just accept the teachings of another, however, he obeys them. The one whose disciple he has chosen to become is not only his teacher, he is his master. So to become a disciple of Christ we must be prepared to accept Him as Lord and bring ourselves under His discipline. While we read of Christ as “teaching” His disciples, we also read of Him as “commanding”, “charging”, “constraining” and “sending” them etc. (Matt. 11:1; 14:22; 16:20; 21:1,6); and, on the other hand, we read of His disciples obeying His word, and so doing the will of His Father in heaven (John 8:31; Matt. 12:49,50).

3. Following a Pattern.

A disciple is also a follower, because he takes his teacher and his master as his pattern, and seeks to be like him. He has no higher ambition than to be perfectly like his mentor (Matt. 10:24,25; Luke 6:40). While this has to be qualified in the case of mortal men (Matt. 23:1-3), no qualification is needed in the case of the perfect man, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 11:29; 1Cor. 11:1; 1Pet. 2:21).

We can have no higher aim in life than to be so instructed in His teaching and submissive to His will that we become conformed to His Person (2Cor. 3:18; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5).

In Luke 9:57-62 we are reminded of:

A THREEFOLD CAUTION given to three different individuals. We are taught.

1. The Danger of Presumption.

“As they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” Here was enthusiasm and confidence. This man volunteered; he did not wait to be called; and he was quite confident in his ability to follow the Lord wherever He might go. The Lord does not forbid him, but He instructs him quite plainly in the cost of following Him - “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head”. If this man’s enthusiasm was genuine, he was free to share such a pathway; but was he willing for this? It would need more than carnal emotion and self-confidence to share the Saviour’s lowly pathway. He must count the cost and make a sober and thoughtful decision.

2. The Danger of Prevarication.

“And He said unto another. Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Here is a man personally and authoritatively called, “Follow Me”, but instead of obeying, he feels he must do something else. Did the Lord not know his circumstances before He called him? Yet his duty to his dead father is more to this man than his duty to his living Lord. He calls Him “Lord”, but will not yield instant obedience. It has been said that obedience delayed is disobedience. The Lord had a present task for him, “Go thou, and preach the kingdom of God”. This man’s father was an unbeliever who had died in his sins, for the Lord said, “Let the dead bury their dead”; what could the son do to help him now? But there were those for whom it was not yet too late; let him seek to reach them with the gospel.

3. The Danger of Wrong Priorities.

In some ways the third man was a strange mixture of the preceding two. He is a volunteer, like the first man; but he has something he wishes to attend to first, like the second man. Both these last two use the significant words, “Me first”. If it is a case of “Me first”, we have no right to call Christ, “Lord”. If He is Lord then He must come first. The second man wished to put his dead father before Christ, the third man wished to put his living family before Christ. Their priorities were wrong. Compare true disciples in Mark 1:16-20. The Lord had to say to this last individual, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”. For the pathway of discipleship is one which entails:

A THREEFOLD COST

Three times in Luke 14:26-33 we read of a condition imposed by the Lord Jesus apart from which a man “cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26,27,33). The one considering the path of discipleship must be prepared for:

1. Sanctification.

He must be prepared to sanctify Christ as Lord in his heart and life, giving Him a unique place in his affections, unrivalled by any, including earth’s nearest and dearest, and even by himself or his own life! No-one, not even one’s own self, must be loved more than Christ. The word “hate” here obviously has a comparative sense, to love less – compare Matt. 10:37. A follower of the Lord Jesus Christ must love earthly relations, because He commands it; and it is a bad testimony when it is lacking and our families are neglected (1Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:22-6:4; Col. 3:17-21; 1Tim. 5:4,8). But when a natural love of others conflicts with our love to Christ in obeying His commandments, a true disciple must put Christ first, and obey Him, even if it means displeasing one’s family (Luke 12:51-53).

2. Suffering.

The Lord Jesus said, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple”. The world finally rejected Christ and crucified Him, and He is teaching here that His disciples can expect no better treatment. The more closely and faithfully we follow the Lord, the more the world will hate us as it hated Him, and the more closely its treatment of us will conform to its treatment of Him (John 15:18-21; 1John 3:13).

3. Sacrifice.

“Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple.” He who would be a disciple of Christ must be prepared to bring all his earthly possessions and prospects to Christ and submit them to His ordering, to use or to lose as He sees fit.

But in Matthew 12:46-50 the Lord suggests:

A THREEFOLD COMPENSATION for discipleship.

When His mother and brethren sought His attention and disturbed His ministry, He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, “Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother”. This indicates:

1. A Special Affinity with Christ.

His earthly brethren believed not on Him and consequently were out of harmony with Him (John 7:1-8), and even His mother at times misunderstood Him and needed instruction (Luke 2:48-50) or rebuke (John 2:1-4). But His disciples are marked by the same spirit and manner of life as Himself, the perfect doer of the will of God. Theirs is a spiritual kinship more real than that of earth.

2. A Special Affection.

Those who love Christ with that special love required in a disciple, are loved by Christ with a special love reserved for disciples. Compare John 13:1; 14:21.

3. A Special Acquaintance.

His disciples form the inner circle of His acquaintance; they are closer to Him than earth's nearest and dearest. Because they are nearer to His ways and nearer to His heart, they are nearer to His counsels. With them He will share His secret thoughts and intimate feelings. Disciples are favoured with fuller teachings than others; they receive special divine unfoldings of truth, because of their faith and teachableness (Matt. 13:10-12; Mark 4:34). They enjoy a closer intimacy with the Lord, and the more truth they receive, the more is revealed to them. This is a threefold present recompense, in addition to eternal rewards (Matt. 16:24-27).

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Behold My Servant

My Servant

In the book of Isaiah, reference is made to servants of God. King David is called "my servant" (Isa. 37:35), and elsewhere, as in Isaiah 41:8, the servant is the nation of Israel. Both King David and the nation of Israel failed God. They were not perfect servants, but, praise God, there was one Perfect Servant who did not, and could not, fail, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten, eternal, beloved, and altogether lovely Son of God. God said, concerning His Perfect Servant, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1 [cited in Matt. 12:18]). God is telling us to "Behold", to consider well God's Servant; the One He upheld as He served God as a dependent man; His "elect"; the One He had chosen and in whom He delighted.

The Lord Jesus Christ always did what was pleasing to God His Father (Jn. 8:29). He glorified His Father and finished the work His Father had given Him to do (Jn. 17:4). He, the pre-eminent, incomparable, unique Son of God, who is co-existent, co-eternal and co-equal with God His Father, "took upon Him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). He took the form of a bondservant (*doulos*), being in absolute and complete subjection to the will of God His Father. His will was His Father's will for He and His Father are one (Jn. 10:30), and there is perfect union between them eternally.

The Lord Jesus Christ was God "manifest in the flesh" (1Tim. 3:16). He was "God with us" (Matt. 1:23); "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), and "the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). In Him dwelt all the fulness of Deity in bodily form (Col. 2:9). He created all things (Jn. 1:3): all things were made by Him and for Him, and he holds all things together (Col. 1:16,17).

The Lord is the very essence and substance of God and expresses the mind of God. He became a man (Jn. 1:14), but He was not a mere man for He never ceased to be what He is eternally, and that is God. During His time on earth, the Lord's intrinsic glory, majesty and splendour were veiled by His flesh. There came a time, however, when He was transfigured, that is, His appearance changed (Matt. 17:1-8; 2Pet. 1:16-18). The Lord was transfigured, His intrinsic glory shone forth. His face shone like the sun, and His "raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:2): it shone with the glory and brightness of uncreated light.

Obedient unto death

Why should the pre-eminent, incomparable, unique Son of God leave heaven where He was loved, worshipped and obeyed and come down to this earth? He was born of a virgin, lived in humble circumstances and dwelt in despised Nazareth. The Perfect Servant was made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7), and there was nothing in His outward appearance that would attract men to Him (Isa. 53:2). He was despised and rejected by the majority. He became a “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3), and endured great “contradiction of sinners against Himself” (Heb. 12:3). He “came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (Jn. 1:11). Even those who loved Him sometimes saddened Him by their sinful behaviour and unbelief. The Lord experienced no surprises, for He knew, even before He created the world, all that He would suffer during His incarnation.

We praise and thank God for the truth that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Tim. 1:15): He came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). Every believer can rejoice and marvel in knowing that He “loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). The Lord was driven, at all times, by His desire to glorify, honour and obey His Father and to do His will. He was sent by His Father. We are told that “the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1Jn. 4:14). The Lord said, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me” (Jn. 6:38), and “I come ... to do thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7). He said to His disciples, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work” (Jn. 4:34). In His total submission and self-imposed limitations, He said, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (Jn. 5:30). The Lord’s delight was to do the will of God His Father (Ps. 40:8).

The Lord loves His Father and said, “I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do” (Jn. 14:31), and the Father loves His Son (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 17:24). The love in the Godhead is infinite and eternal, and yet such is the love of God for lost sinners (Jn. 3:16), that “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law” (Gal. 4:4,5). God’s complete and eternal delight is in His beloved Son (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). The Lord, in His time on earth, lived as a dependent man, obedient to His Father. He said, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (Jn. 5:19), and “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (Jn. 8:28). The Lord, the eternal Son of the eternal God, was anointed by God His Father “with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Acts 10:38).

The Perfect Servant

The Perfect Servant lived all His time on earth as a bondservant to God His Father. He was a Servant who, “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). We see love and grace in all the Lord did and said. He never ceased to be God when He became a man possessed of holy, sinless humanity (2Cor. 5:21), living as a Perfect Man, Perfect Servant and Perfect Saviour, dependent on, and absolutely submissive to, God His Father. The Lord exercised divine, infinite power over demons (Lk. 7:21); His creation (Mk. 4:39); disease (Matt. 4:23), and death (Jn. 11:44), always serving and glorifying God His Father, bringing pleasure and joy to Him. He knew what men were thinking and what their intentions were (Jn. 2:24,25; Mk. 2:8; Lk. 5:22), and “Never man spake like this man” (Jn. 7:46). The miracles He performed showed His omnipotence and the things He said revealed His omniscience. Only He could fully know and understand His Father (Jn. 8:55; 10:15).

The Lord’s submission and obedience to His Father was undeviating, and there came a time when He allowed Himself to be taken by Roman soldiers and led away to be crucified. Had he so desired, He could have called “more than twelve legions of angels” to His assistance (Matt. 26:53), but, as always, He was carrying out the predetermined plan of His Father (Acts 2:23), and fulfilling the Scriptures which had been written so many years before (Matt. 26:54). The Lord always knew every detail of the sufferings which lay ahead of Him when, on the cross, He would glorify God and make possible our salvation.

The Lord had a body which had been prepared for Him in the womb of His virgin mother (Heb. 10:5). In this body He would serve and glorify God, suffering, bleeding and dying. He offered Himself as the sinless

sacrifice for sin and suffered, as our Substitute, the punishment our sins deserve from God who is holy. He said, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (Jn. 10:17,18).

Before the crucifixion, when prostrate in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord said, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Lk. 22:42). The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ was the focal point of the history of the world. All events preceding it were controlled by God so that His will was done. All God's intents, purposes and plans, and all events following the crucifixion and on into eternity, are founded on the fact of the crucifixion. The Lord was in absolute control: He could say to the repentant thief alongside Him, speaking with the authority of Deity, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). Death, both physical and eternal, are the result of sin (Rom. 5:12), and the Lord, being eternally sinless, was never a dying man. If He had not dismissed His spirit (Jn. 19:30), He would not have died and in so doing tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8). Praise God, death could not hold the Holy One, and after three days, God's perfect, unfailing Servant rose from the dead (Lk. 24:6).

I have given you an example

Meditation on the many beauties and glories of the Lord Jesus Christ stimulate love for Him and desires to serve and worship Him. He said, "I am among you as He that serveth" (Lk. 22:27). The Lord was the bondservant of God His Father but to men He was a servant (*diakonos*), not subject to their will but serving them because He loved them and wanted to reveal to them His mind, humility and attitude. He said to them, "whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:44,45).

The mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5), and His desire to serve others were shown when, in His willingness to do the work normally done by a servant or slave, He washed the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:4-10). Having done this, He said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you ... The servant is not greater than his lord; neither He that is sent greater than He that sent Him" (Jn. 13:14-16).

Adam was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), but he sinned, and now those of us, his descendants, who have been saved must seek to be more conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29). It behoves us, in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to strive to be more like Him in all aspects of our lives. The Lord suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps (1Pet. 2:21). He is coming back to take believers to be with Himself for ever (1Thess. 4:16,17). He could return at any moment. In the meantime, we should seek to serve and obey the Lord, the Perfect Servant, being motivated by love for Him. We can, and do, fail Him, but God is gracious, and if we repent and confess our sins (1Jn. 1:9), He will restore us to Himself and to service for Him. On Paul's first missionary journey, Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:38), but Mark, the servant who failed, was graciously restored and used to write the second Gospel, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Servant who did not fail.

The Perfect Servant came that, through His holy, sinless life and His atoning sacrifice, He might glorify His Father and make it possible for us to be saved. The Lord, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despised the shame and is now seated on the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2). He looked beyond the cross to the glory that should follow (1Pet. 1:11). His joy comes from seeing sinners saved, and living to do His Father's will and glorifying Him. The Lord will be satisfied when He sees the results of His sufferings, sorrows and agonies. He will present us "faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). His redeemed will be with Him eternally, praising and worshipping Him and enjoying the glory He had with His Father before the world was (Jn. 17:5,24).

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Questions and Answers

Question: Why did the Lord Jesus Christ, when He rose from the dead, say to Mary Magdalene, “Touch me not” (John 20:17), yet to Thomas He said; “Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side” (John 20:27)?

Answer: The word “touch” which the Lord used with Mary Magdalene means, “do not cling to me”, in the sense of “do not continue holding on to me”. The Lord thus indicated to Mary that He was not going to remain bodily present but was about to ascend unto the Father. Thus He would no longer be tangibly present or physically near but He would have a spiritual presence as ascended to heaven.

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus said to His own, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). The word here rendered “handle” means “to feel, to touch”. This was the Lord’s invitation to them to accept in His being bodily present in their midst.

John records the occasion when the Lord Jesus came “where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews ... and stood in the midst”, and we are told that “he shewed unto them his hands, and his side” (John 20:19,20). Then we read, “Thomas ... was not with them when Jesus came” (v24). When, after being told by the other disciples, “We have seen the Lord”, Thomas responded, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails ... and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (v25).

After eight days the Lord again appeared to His disciples with Thomas being present. He at once revealed to Thomas that He was well acquainted with the test that Thomas demanded. Thomas rose high in his acknowledgement of the risen Lord when He said; “My Lord and my God” (v28). It would seem that Thomas did not need to touch. “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (v29).

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**For 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. For we are His
workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
unto good works ...**

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

Most individuals have a biasness for self preservation even when all seems against them. Circumstances however can often arise causing an individual to ‘give up’ the desire or will to live. Considering the important issue of the soul’s salvation, men always make it a matter of human effort and work; the Bible however declares it a matter of God’s grace acting through faith in Christ. It is when we ‘give up’ on our own efforts that God can work in us.

Grace Necessary due to our Condition

From God’s viewpoint, man’s fundamental problem is that he is **“dead in trespasses and sins”** (Eph. 2:1) meaning each one of us has overstepped and fallen short of that acceptable conduct that God originally created man to exhibit. Naturally, we walk **“according to the course of this world ... in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind”** with a dreadful expectation as **“children of wrath”** (Eph. 2:2,3). The ‘flesh’ is that debase, carnal nature we possess by which it is impossible to merit God’s favour and acceptance by a system of works or religion.

Even with the most caring and generous among us, there lies within the hearts of all, that plague of sin that contaminates all that we think is good. Man's only hope therefore lies not in his own 'good works' but in the 'good work' of another. It was God Himself who came to undertake that work in the Person of His Son as He moved out towards this sinful, undeserving world through grace.

Christ's Grace seen in His Works

It should first be noted that Christ's life was characterised by good: He ***"went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him"*** (Acts 10:38). The gospel records are full of examples of His works proving His deity, the purity of His sinless character, His compassion and grace moved by a heart of sympathy as He lived among men emphasising His deeper interest in the moral and spiritual condition of man, prior to the greatest work of grace that He was to accomplish for God and men. Some see Him as just a ***"good man"*** (John 7:12) setting His life as an example to follow or a ***"good master"*** or teacher (Mark 10:17) giving some credit to His teachings as good principles to embrace. Either way, both views fall far short of a true confession of who Christ really is, setting an emphasis upon man doing something for himself, rather than upon the work that Christ came to do for man.

Christ's Greatest Work of Grace

It was the Lord Jesus Himself who declared ***"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep"*** (John 10:11). The price of man's salvation to God was immensely great, necessitating the sufferings of His Son on the Cross outside Jerusalem's walls 2000 years ago. He was ***"wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities"*** when He laid down His life as a sacrifice for sin, prior to His glorious bodily resurrection from the dead.

By this one act alone we can be ***"justified freely by His (God's) grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"*** (Romans 3:24) if we by faith readily accept Christ and His great work for ourselves. It is however a serious matter indeed to despise the work of Christ in place of our own boasted self efforts which can only be described as ***"dead works"*** that can never impart life to our dead souls. We will tragically face the consequences of our sin for ever in Hell.

God's Grace changes Lives

Those who know not the truth or the power of God will falsely claim that salvation by grace gives license and liberty to sin. This could not be further from the truth. Those who genuinely repent and through faith in the Lord Jesus receive everlasting life as a gift from God, will manifest a change of attitude towards sin with their hope set heavenward in anticipation of being with Christ their Lord. They will be characterised by good and righteous works that bring pleasure to the heart of God, not to merit His favour, but out of impulse from the very love of God that He implants into the soul of a forgiven sinner by His Holy Spirit at their conversion, as the following verses so clearly declare:

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:11-14).

In summary, there is nothing we ourselves can do to merit God's favour and save our souls from the fearsomeness of hell. We must accept gratuitously the work of Christ on the cross. His response to those who asked how they might work the work of God was: ***"This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent"*** (John 6:29). Let us search our own hearts to clarify where our confidence rests and to determine the true motive for our works.

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