

# The Old Paths – January / March : 2021 – No 29

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**F**or thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and ... the heart of the contrite ones. ... But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word ... Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at His word; (Isaiah 57:15; 66:2,5)



## From the Editor’s Desk

### “The Soul that is Blessed”

**“Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases”  
(Psalm 103:1-3)**

The supreme reasons to eulogise the Lord in this lovely Psalm are these two statements in verse 3, “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases”. As thousands die and millions are stricken down by the Coronavirus pandemic, the global cry of mankind is for a vaccine to cure this awful physical disease. As believers, we continue to cry to God for His mercy at the close of the Day of Grace that such a cure may be found.

However the Scriptural order in Psalm 103:3 is to be emphasised. Forgiveness of sins comes first before the temporal provision of health of body. When the Lord healed the helpless man sick of the palsy He said: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5). The root cause of man’s problems are his sins. Leprosy is the uncleanness of sin, in fever we see the manifestation of the restlessness of sin. The blindness, deafness,

deadness of sin are pictured in the miracles, for “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jam. 1:15). God is gracious in granting the temporal healing of the body and the mind. Here, the Psalmist David begins with the eternal and spiritual necessity of his iniquities having been forgiven.

“Iniquity” is sin against the WILL of God; “Who will have all men to be saved” (1Tim. 2:4).

“Transgression” is sin against the WORD of God; “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19).

“Sin” is against the WORK of God manifest in His Son; “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

The Saviour has broken down the barrier between God and the sinner. He needed no protective wear. He touched the leper but He never became a leper. He reached out His hand and touched the hand of the fevered woman, but He never contracted fever. The Bible says that He was made sin (2Cor. 5:21), but He never became a sinner. Christ undefiled, unblemished, untainted had clean hands and a pure heart. The message of the Cross is, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases”.

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## The Marriage at Cana of Galilee

**Introduction.** John chapter 2:1-11, records for us the very familiar circumstances of the first miracle of the Lord Jesus. Cana of Galilee was the location and a marriage was the occasion. Jesus, His mother and His new disciples were present when the wine ran out and when the Lord Jesus miraculously turned water-filled pots into wine. We trust the following observations on this familiar passage might not only challenge us, but also be a blessing to us as well.

**The Setting – Cana of Galilee.** Cana was just ten miles north of Nazareth. Here, in this obscure Galilean village, the first miracle was performed – not in the presence of the great political, religious and military personnel of the day, not in the recognised geographical spheres of importance like Jerusalem, but in the presence of ordinary folk in a little known village! To the natural eye there were no VIP’s present. Even those getting married are unknown to us. Throughout John’s gospel we see the Lord Jesus speaking to those of status but also to unnamed ordinary folk. In John chapter 3 He reveals Himself to the highly educated, morally upright, refined, well-thought of, gifted Jew (Nicodemus). Then in John chapter 4 the Lord reveals Himself to the uneducated, immoral, unrefined woman of Samaria who had no status. She is unnamed, yet Nicodemus is – yet both had to come the same way. So it is today. Whatever our status and attainments before men, we all have the same need, we all have to come the same way and we all can be used of God.

**Those Present at the Wedding.** Apart from the numerous unnamed other guests, Jesus, His mother and His disciples were present at this marriage. The disciples had just been called a few days earlier (John 1:35-44), and they included Andrew, Peter and Philip with possibly John and James as well (see Mark 1:16-20). The Lord never calls lazy people. These disciples all had previous occupations (see also Amos 7:15). When people cannot get work, that is a different matter. So, just days after their calling, these disciples were already associated with the Lord Jesus. We also notice that Mary’s husband Joseph was not mentioned as being present, possibly because he had died by this time. Although not specifically stated, it does seem that Jesus’ brethren (His brothers and sisters) were also at the wedding. Certainly after the marriage feast, the natural interpretation of verse 12 is that Cana of Galilee was the starting point for the journey which His

brethren, His disciples and His mother took with Him down to Capernaum. It is reasonable to assume they had all been at Cana of Galilee for the same reason.

**The Lord's Family.** Mary had at least seven children, and this was probably quite typical for the day. Apart from the Lord Jesus, there were four named brothers – James, Joses, Simon and Judas – and at least two unnamed sisters (Matt. 13:55-56). John himself in John 7:5 relates that His brethren did not believe at this time. How many families are like this today, with godly mothers and unsaved children? It seems that as the Lord grew up in the obscurity of Nazareth, all the time He had unsaved siblings. Even at Calvary when His disciples had forsaken Him and fled, there is no record of any of His family, except Mary (and her sister), as being there (John 19:25). It seems that the Lord's brothers and sisters still didn't believe, as He committed His mother into the care of John at this time (John 19:26-27). Yet what an encouragement to believers today in a similar position to know that after Calvary, His brethren did believe (Acts 1:14). James and Jude (Judas) were even inspired to write epistles after Calvary. If there are any in your immediate or extended family who are not saved (as there are in the present writer's family), then don't give up hope. Keep on praying.

**The Marriage.** This was a typical Jewish wedding between two of God's earthly people. The Lord was called (invited) (v2) and His presence was to make a vital difference as events turned out. His presence enhances any gathering of His people, not just on a wedding day but throughout life, and has a sanctifying effect. The best way to start and to continue married life is with the Lord in your company as an "invited guest". It is crucial to have the conscious presence of the Lord not only in all our gatherings, but also in all our affairs of life. His presence was crucial then, and it still is now.

**Marriage – A Divine Institution.** Here we see the Lord Jesus walking in a world that He had created, talking to people made in His image and present at a marriage which He, in the Godhead, had originally instituted. Marriage has been the binding of human relationships throughout Scripture: it is first mentioned in Genesis 2:24 and lastly in Revelation 21:2,9. Marriage and family life had always been intended to be the foundations of human society. There are many examples of godly couples in Scripture – Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-6) and Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-4), are two obvious ones. Sadly, in the 21st Century, these foundations are being attacked, weakened and undermined. In this present lockdown situation we pray for the preservation of marriages.

**Mary.** Mary's last recorded words in Scripture are seen in verse 5 of our chapter. She was a spiritual woman, as a careful study of Luke 1:26-56 would indicate. It seems she believed that the Lord could remedy the situation, even though He had not performed a miracle before. She spoke to the Lord on behalf of and for the benefit of others. Does that not speak to us today? Do we do that? For thirty years Mary had seen the godly, consistent life of her Son. No doubt she had pondered many things in her heart, not only the shepherds' visit (Luke 2:19) and the incident in the Temple when He was twelve years of age (Luke 2:51).

**A Woman of Faith.** Mary was a woman of faith. She had believed the angel Gabriel over thirty years earlier, that what was about to happen to her was the will of God (Luke 1:38,45). Despite her lack of natural understanding of what the angel had said, she believed that God could do what He had never done before – for a woman to conceive and give birth before it was humanly and biologically possible. Mary showed faith then and seems to show it now at Cana of Galilee at the marriage feast. Her appeal to the Lord concerning the lack of wine is surely a challenge to us! How many times in life have we faced seemingly unsolvable situations? Mary went to the right person – anyone else or anything else would have been futile. She told Him everything and got straight to the point, then left it to Him. She made no suggestions or advice on how to solve the matter. It must be the same with us – take it to the Lord in prayer, be honest, and leave it entirely with Him – in faith!

**A Quiet Demeanour.** Here was a woman of few recorded words. No words from Mary are recorded at His birth, neither at His death. She seems to have stood silent at Calvary. What a contrast to the "bulls", "dogs" and "roaring lion" of Psalm 22, which prophetically describes all those arrayed against the Saviour at Calvary. Many have seen their mothers die. Fewer have seen their first-born Son die! She so easily could have stayed at home.

**The Miracle.** What a predicament in a Jewish wedding to run out of wine. The need was great, yet the Lord knew the need. (He is omniscient: He knows all things (John 2:24; 16:30; 21:17; 1John 3:20)). Yet we notice that He was told about the need and, by implication, He was asked if He could meet that need. He knows all about us, all our needs (not wants), yet we still need to come before Him in faith, making our requests known unto Him (Phil. 4:6). All of the Lord's miracles exhibited an eternal power that was foreign to the experiences of men. There were miracles performed in the O.T. by men of God who were granted invested power from God for particular occasions. Here, at Cana, we see One moving and acting in His Own inherent power.

**Meeting Every Need.** The water was not just turned into wine, but into the best wine, indicative of quality. In John 6:5-14 we read the feeding of the five thousand (men) with the five loaves and two fishes, indicative of quantity. In John 4:46-54 we read of the healing of the nobleman's son. The Lord spoke the word in Cana of Galilee (the second miracle in this obscure village) and the son was cured at Capernaum (about 15 miles away), indicative of miracles performed at a distance. The first of these miracles took place in scenes of joy (the marriage), the second at a time of need (the crowd was hungry) whilst the third one was in circumstances of distress. Yet the Lord could meet the need on any occasion – as He still can today!

**The Effects of the Miracle.** John 2:11 indicates the two-fold effect of this miracle – that the Lord manifested forth His glory and the disciples believed on Him. In the O.T. the glory of God had been seen in the Tabernacle. Later, Isaiah was privileged to see it in and above the Temple (Isaiah 6:1) – this being interpreted by John as being the glory of Christ (John 12:41). This glory would be revealed later on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:2). Yet His glory was seen in these miracles/signs and also revealed by what He was morally. The disciples' faith was deepened – verse eleven says they "believed". "Believe" is a key word in John's Gospel; in the King James Version "believe", "believed", etc., are used 140 times in the four Gospels, 101 of these occasions being in John's Gospel.

**Obedience and Ignorance.** Mary showed absolute confidence in the ability of her Son, even if the circumstances were unclear at the time. So it should be with us – "trust and obey" – leave our requests and burdens with the Lord and walk in His paths. The servants obeyed promptly and without question. The ruler of the feast (and probably most of the other guests) was ignorant of what had really happened. The ruler commended the bridegroom (vv. 9-10), obviously oblivious to the miracle and who had performed it. This is really just like people in the world of today, completely ignorant of One who upholds, maintains and sustains all things, yet they are willing to partake of the resultant blessings. The wonders of nature, the intricacies of the human body, the complexity of the Universe, etc., are all attributed by mankind to natural, self-supporting and self-evolving processes without a Divine hand! We, as believers, readily believe that God is behind all that we understand, yet we need also, like Mary, to readily believe that God is also behind all that our human minds do not understand!

**An Application.** Jewish wedding feasts were characterized by having the best wine first and subsequently that of less quality later, when perhaps the guests couldn't tell the difference by that stage. This could be applied spiritually. Men, in their own strength, start and mean well but degenerate as time proceeds because of the lack of spiritual strength and power. Yet God can take us at our lowest/worst (still in our sin) and then raise us up to the best/highest (Eph. 2:4-6). Historically, the first plague was the turning of the waters of Egypt into blood (Ex. 7:19) – reminding us of judgement and death – yet this first miracle by the Lord Jesus of turning water into wine speaks of joy and blessing.

**Real Joy.** Just as the best wine was provided by the Lord, so real joy and happiness is only to be found in Him today. In normal times the world around us is seeking fun and trivial things, but just as the wine ran-out at this marriage, so their "joy" effervesces at times – when the music stops, when the latest crazes become boring and when everything seems flat. The world's happiness seems to depend on what mood they are in and what circumstances they find themselves. However, Christian joy is real joy. God's desire for us is that in keeping His commandments, we might experience God's joy to the full (John 15:10-11). We can even experience real spiritual joy in times of difficulty and trying circumstances, just like we are in at the present time.

The writing of this article has been with the prayerful exercise of magnifying the power and glory of Christ and to challenge us, as believers, to rely implicitly on Him in all circumstances.

### **Some Further thoughts on Marriage**

**Marriage – A Sensitive Issue.** Volumes have been written on the subject of marriage, so we simply wish to bring before the reader what we believe Scripture teaches on the subject. The issues before us are very sensitive and have been found to really test assembly unity and fellowship between different assemblies. In looking at the subject before us, what is our prime objective? Is it to accommodate what's happening in the world and admit that we "can't swim against the tide"? Is it to come in defence of those in our family that we love, come what may? Or is it that God and His word are to be honoured and assembly holiness to be maintained?

**Marriage – When was it Established?** Scripture teaches clearly that marriage is a creatorial institution. Believers often speak of Christian marriage, and we understand what they mean, namely a union between two believers (hopefully like-minded believers and "in the Lord"). Yet marriage in the Bible precedes Pentecost, so it's not just a Christian institution. It also precedes the establishment of the nation of Israel, so it's not even a Jewish institution. Marriage was instituted by God right from the beginning (Gen. 2:24), so the principle of marriage between opposing genders applied to all mankind from then on – to believers and unbelievers alike! Circumstances and social standards may (and do) change, but what God instituted at the beginning is constant. Scripture upholds the absolute indissolubility of marriage, except by death. It also teaches that re-marriage is clearly forbidden if the first spouse is still living (whether the guilty or innocent person), otherwise a state of perpetual adultery occurs (Mark 10:11-12).

**Marriage – Being Saved.** Becoming a Christian does not change an adulterous relationship of those divorced and re-married. Salvation doesn't change what was wrong before being saved into being right after being saved. A saved thief ceases from stealing after being saved; a saved murderer ceases from killing after being saved; a saved former embezzler ceases from defrauding people after salvation, and so on. Similarly, those that live in adultery before being saved have to cease the adulterous relationship. Salvation in no way enhances this relationship. Actually it flatly condemns it! To say that God was not in the original marriage, because a person was not saved, is wrong. All marriages, with their vows, are before God, both saved and unsaved alike, and always have been since the beginning of time. Perhaps these things are hard to swallow, we may even be accused of having no empathy with current situations, but surely we must put God and His word and His will first in all our thinking and actions.

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## **Worship in Luke's Gospel (3)**

As we move through Luke's Gospel, it is very striking to see how almost every miracle results in joy and praise. Although Luke is much appreciated as the Gospel of the perfect Man, it is remarkable that in most of these cases the divinity of the Lord Jesus is clearly emphasized and the praise is addressed to Him. First we will look at six miracles recorded by Luke and then at two other incidents connected with worship.

**Ch. 5:25,26 – The disabled is enabled.** Here we have a man sick of the palsy – paralysed. He was so weak that he had to be brought in his bed by four friends, and that with great difficulty. The Lord simply says to him: "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee". The scribes and Pharisees may have been right in thinking, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" But they only got as far as thinking it. The Lord proved He was indeed God, by answering their thoughts. No doubt it was a great relief to this man to know his sins were forgiven: but he was still paralyzed. If the four friends had been called to hoist him back up and the man had been sent home forgiven but still paralyzed, it would have proved the objections to be true. But of course, the Lord

proved that the man's sins had been forgiven by taking away the paralysis which they had caused. "And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day".

There is a very real, and intended, parallel between this miracle and the forgiving of a sinner. By nature, we are "without strength" (Romans 5:6). Even the good things we do are stained by sin and pride. "They that are in the flesh (i.e. unregenerate) cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). How sad it is to see professing Christians rejoicing in the supposed pardon of their sins, when they are still paralyzed by sin. We cannot "un-paralyze" ourselves any more than the man in Luke 5, but the Lord will only be glorified when we not only talk about being forgiven, but are seen to walk according to the Spirit to prove it.

**Ch. 7:16 – The dead is enlivened.** It was like the encounter of two armies: the army of death and despair coming out of Nain bearing the lifeless body of a widow's only son, and the army of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life with His disciples approaching the town. Neither death nor despair could remain in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Soon the widow's son was alive and well and her hopes were restored. What was the result in Nain? "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people". Several times in the Scriptures the question is asked, "What is man ... that Thou visitest him?". We praise the Lord that, although man is frail and mortal, his need has brought the Saviour-God into the world, "That we might live through Him" (1John 4:9).

**Ch. 9:43 – The demon-possessed is pacified by the Lord.** Coming down from the mount of transfiguration, the Lord was confronted with the case of a demon-possessed child, the only son of his father. The disciples had failed to cast it out. But no devil can stand against His powerful word. We then read, "And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God ... they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did".

The scene as He came down from the mount was a miniature of the state of the world into which He came down from heaven. Even a child could become the dwelling place of evil, agitated and convulsed by the foul spirit which had possessed him. But we too can wonder and worship because "the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1John 3:8).

**Ch. 13:13,17 – Degraded by Satan but ennobled by the Lord.** The Bible says, "God hath made man upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29), but Satan had bound this poor woman so that she "was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself". The religious authorities would have kept her in this condition, especially on the sabbath, but the Lord delivered her "and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God". As a result: "all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him".

Our natural state as sinners is to be bowed down, unable to look up or stand upright. The salvation provided by the Lord at immense cost makes us upright again and enables us to look up unto Him. Most animals were created to look downward but man was created upright. Evolution is part of Satan's plan to degrade us and keep us looking downward to the earth instead of upward to God, who created us "in His image and after His likeness". The Gospel ennoble us and makes us upright – "the LORD ... raiseth up all those that be bowed down" (Psalm 145:14). If we are saved, we can join the Psalmist in singing, "Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright" (Psalm 33:1).

**Ch. 17:15-18 – Defiled by leprosy but purified by the Lord.** Ten lepers were healed by the Lord Jesus, but Luke focuses on the Samaritan, the only one of the ten who returned to give thanks: "And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks ... And Jesus answering said, were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger".

Many modern versions will not permit Luke to call Jesus "God" here, and read, "at the feet of Jesus" instead of, "at His feet", in order to avoid the idea that the man worshipped Jesus as God. However, there is no textual basis for this change, and we might well enquire as to the motive behind it. The fact is that

the Samaritan “with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down ... at His feet, giving Him thanks”. That the Lord did not refuse or rebuke such worship is further evidence that He was indeed “God with us”.

Again, there is a clear picture here of salvation and its results in joy and praise. Leprosy is especially a defiling disease. The leper not only had to isolate himself from his family and from society, but was also banished from the temple. Sin is the same. It is the cause of divisions in families and communities, but worse still, it separates us from God and keeps us out of His holy habitation. Only the blood of God’s Son can cleanse us from sin’s defilement and bring us into God’s presence. Let us praise Him for this, both now and for ever.

**Ch. 18:43 – In darkness, then enlightened by the Lord.** This miracle illustrates the fact that true faith comes by hearing and not by sight. There were many who believed because of the miracles they had seen, but “Jesus did not commit himself unto them” (John 2:24). This man obviously could not see the Lord’s mighty works, but he heard the glad tidings: “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by”, and called upon the name of the Lord. “And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God”.

Darkness is another familiar description of the state of a sinner “having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). We were not only in darkness, but we were darkness (Ephesians 5:8). But now through God’s wondrous grace we are in the light and we are light. Now, by faith, we can see Him, we can follow Him, and glorify God.

Finally, Luke also brings two other cases before us which emphasize the preciousness of praise.

**Ch. 7:37,38 – The forgiven sinner.** “And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment”. This woman, known as “a woman in the city, which was a sinner”, had evidently heard the Lord’s invitation to sinners and received His forgiveness. Now she comes to bow at His feet in worship and fills the Pharisee’s house with fragrance. In her act of grateful worship she combines two precious Old Testament Scriptures. She, a pardoned sinner, puts herself in the privileged place of the bride in Solomon’s song: “While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof” (Song of Solomon 1:12), and at the same time does that which the kings and judges of the earth are exhorted to do: “Kiss the Son” (Psalm 2:11-12). Let us take our place at her side in thankful worship for His love towards us.

**Ch. 19:37,38 – The foretold Saviour.** “And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest”. Here is the Lord Jesus seated upon a previously untamed ass colt, clearly identifying Himself with the promised Messiah in Zechariah 9:9. Notice how Luke is inspired to speak of the praise of the multitude of disciples: they “began to rejoice and praise God ... saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord”. Here is another example of Luke’s clear statements of the divinity of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord’s coming down from heaven was celebrated by the heavenly hosts singing, “Peace on earth”. Now that the time of His “receiving up” was drawing near, the earthly multitude of His disciples sing, “peace in heaven”. Eventually the Saviour will fill heaven and earth with His peace. But “glory in the highest” is the common theme of both of these choirs. Through His “good will toward men”, saved sinners today can add their voices to these hosts, “from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD” (Psalm 115:18).

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# The Acts of the Apostles

## Chapter 9:22-31

### Saul's preaching in Damascus after returning from Arabia (v.22-25)

Before considering the text in Acts 9:22-25 we need to consider another passage: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter ..." (Gal. 1:15-18).

Returning to Acts 9:22-25 we note that time references there are rather vague. That, and the passage in Galatians which indicates that Saul went from Damascus to Arabia and returned to Damascus again before going to Jerusalem, allows us to conclude that the Arabian visit occurs between Acts 9:21 and Acts 9:22.

So the reference that "Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" most likely refers to his labours in Damascus subsequent to his return from at least a portion of, if not his entire, three years in Arabia. Saul made very considerable progress in his understanding of divine purpose and truth during this time. It is interesting that God would take men of crucial purpose into the desert to teach them alone away from other human resources, e.g. Moses, Elijah, Saul. His understanding how Scripture referred to the Lord Jesus Christ was deployed to good effect in Damascus, although without any evidence of a beneficial outcome. The Jews could not counter his exposition and were confounded or baffled.

His preaching and discussion, however, led to increasing hostility and "after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him". Saul is going to taste for himself the very things he had been inflicting upon others, and appreciate the truth that he related to Timothy at the end of his life, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Tim. 3:12).

A plot was hatched to carry their murderous intent into effect. This came to the attention of Saul, although all the relevant details are not disclosed other than assassins were posted at all the gates of Damascus and twenty-four-hour surveillance was in place. By this stage Saul had disciples or followers, which indicates that his Christian leadership was already recognised. These took Saul by night and passed him through a window of a house built into the city wall and down on the outside of the wall using ropes and a reed basket of hamper size. This was the same type of basket as was used in the feeding of the four thousand (Matt. 15:37; 16:10). Saul made specific reference to this incident in his later writings: "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands" (2Cor. 11:32,33). This shows that civil rulers were engaged on behalf of the Jews, as the Romans were on behalf of the chief priests when the Lord was crucified. It is interesting that the man who was let down at the end of 2Corinthians chapter 11, was later caught up "to the third heaven" as recorded at the beginning of 2Corinthians chapter 12!

### Saul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (v.26-29)

Saul's coming to Jerusalem resulted in an experience similar to that when he came at first to Damascus. When "he assayed to join himself to the disciples", that is to form a permanent bond with the Jerusalem assembly "they were all afraid of him". This is not surprising and there is no criticism here of the Jerusalem believers. Obviously they were suspicious and fearful given his former activities and reputation, plus the fact that they had not heard of him for 3 years! Each local assembly is responsible in relation to reception. They "believed not that he was a disciple" states the issue clearly. No one has the right to enter into the assembly fellowship until life and doctrine are authenticated: spiritual and moral credentials must be

established prior to reception. Jews and Christians both viewed Saul with suspicion. However, Saul's ministry and service was neither stumbled by opposition at Damascus or by unwillingness at Jerusalem.

Barnabas, "the son of consolation", the one who had demonstrated outstanding generosity in practical issues (Acts 4:36,37), shows largeness of heart here in taking Saul whom he "brought ... to the apostles" and testified as an advocate on his behalf. Barnabas in doing this had to have the necessary credentials to have his verbal report of Saul's conversion and preaching at Damascus "in the name of Jesus" accepted with confidence by the apostles; Peter and James in this case. This unsolicited defence was equivalent to a living letter of commendation. Again further light is shed on this incident elsewhere: "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:18,19).

The conversations between Saul and Peter, James, Barnabas, etc. must have been very interesting indeed both for Saul and the others. But there were more than private conversations, there was open association with all of the Jerusalem believers: "he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." His gathering with the Lord's people for assembly exercises and his public testimony showed that Saul was not content with occasional or casual fellowship during this fifteen-day period. Whether at Damascus or Jerusalem Saul sought out the disciples, which is ever an evidence of true conversion. Saul exhibited his faithfulness in wholehearted devotion to the activities of the Jerusalem assembly.

Saul "spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus". His witness was Christ-centred, courageous and costly. This is seen in his disputing "against the Grecians", the very class of people against whom Stephen had witnessed and of whom Saul belonged. One wonders if this was in the same synagogue as Stephen had preached (Acts 6:9)? What is clear is that Saul is carrying on the work begun by Stephen. Truly 'God buries His workmen, but His work goes on!'

The statement "but they went about to slay him" doesn't tell the whole story here. It was much later that he discloses "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw Him saying unto me, 'Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me'" (Acts 22:17-18). Specific guidance from the Lord Himself caused Saul to leave Jerusalem at this time with haste.

### **Saul returns home (v.30,31)**

Saul therefore had to flee from the Hellenist Jews at Jerusalem. Jewish believers assisted his escape, bringing him to the port of Caesarea and embarked him for Tarsus, his home city. It seems that Saul stayed at Tarsus possibly in a low-key way, if not incognito, for the next seven or eight years. So this chapter starts with Saul leaving Jerusalem with an official mandate to arrest Christians, but here he leaves Jerusalem as a fugitive Christian. Saul the persecutor is now Saul the persecuted! It was here in Tarsus in Cilicia that Saul could mature further in the things of God. Jerusalem was never to be his base; it was only the place of occasional visitation.

It should be pointed out that the description in v.31 is not the result of the actions of Saul narrated in v.30. Rather the **rest** referred to summarises the position at the end of the concerted persecution that had been rigorously advanced by Saul since the martyrdom of Stephen until now. It is the "church" singular, viewed as an organic unity that had rest. Individual local assemblies throughout Judea and Galilee are not being emphasised here. Indeed, the local gatherings throughout those provinces represented the church of Jerusalem fragmented. Their being **edified** does not simply refer to growth numerically, but that the Lord's people were growing in knowledge and spiritually, with development into His mind and likeness. The Lord overrules in the circumstances of believers so that they are not incessantly confronted with trials. Opportunities afforded by such periods are not to be squandered. Spiritual upbuilding should always be of greater priority than numerical increase, although that should also be desired.

"Walking in the fear of the Lord" signals that becoming **reverence** is the essential ingredient for spiritual growth and the development of Christian character.

In summary, the believers gathered to the Lord's name had, for the first time, peace, freedom from persecution or any other external interference, consolidation, encouragement and growth in godliness. It should be noted that all this would be effected by: reference to the Scriptures; to the resource of prayer; the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit. These spiritual resources were abundantly sufficient. No training schools, central human authority, management or structures of government, policy statements, etc. were needed!

(To be continued D.V.)

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## Get to Know Your Bible

### NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 8.

#### GALATIANS

Romans, 1Corinthians, 2Corinthians and Galatians form a group of four Epistles in the Pauline writings which deal with the fundamentals of salvation. In a distinctive sense they stress the preaching of the Cross and the message of a free and full salvation, through faith in Christ crucified and risen again.

The PERSON of the Gospel, His life, death, resurrection and commission are found in the four Gospels.

The PREACHING of the Gospel is traced in the book of Acts.

The PRINCIPLES of the Gospel, Justification, Sanctification and Glorification are the great subjects of Romans.

The POWER of God through the proclamation of the Gospel in the sinful city of Corinth is stressed in the two Epistles which have been previously studied.

The PERVERSION of the Gospel is also the background of Galatians.

The message of salvation by Grace through faith in Christ alone, had been carried by the apostles and scattered believers from Jerusalem, Judæa and Samaria into the Gentile regions of Galatia. False teachers were perverting the pure Gospel by insisting upon the additional works of the law. This controversy was dealt with at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) and the Epistle to the Galatians again defends the fundamental truth; "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). In this Epistle, Paul carefully distinguishes these teachers from the Galatians to whom he is writing (Ch. 1:7-8; 3:1; 4:17; 5:10,12). They worked within the churches and claimed to be Christians. While they professed faith in Christ in doctrine and practice, they minimized and neutralized His Person and His Cross.

#### OCCASION

The Gospel was preached through Galatia by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Assemblies were planted in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and (Pisidian) Antioch as recorded in Acts 13-14. The main roads from Paul's hometown of Tarsus passed directly through these cities. A large Jewish element lived in these locations to which Judaizers had easy access with their false teaching. They questioned the relationship of the Gentile believers to the law of Moses. Since the law had Divine authority, could it be ignored? The implications of their teaching in these churches was that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient for salvation and the works of the law, as well as the mark of circumcision, were needed to complete justification. They raised problems about whether Jews and Gentiles could eat together and partake of the same food. What was at stake was the purity of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle taught that the law condemned sin but that Christ had borne the curse of a broken law upon the Cross. Salvation is by faith in Christ alone. The church is not an extension of Judaism.

This teaching could not be tolerated. The conditions of the churches were so critical that it must be faced with forceful condemnation. Paul was deeply moved. This teaching destroyed the foundations of the Gospel and the fundamental provision of salvation provided by the death of Christ upon the Cross.

Other suggestions have been made by eminent scholars of the Scriptures as to the location of these churches. This is largely because it is difficult to apprehend how such serious perverted teaching could have been allowed into the churches in south Galatia so soon after conversion. Paul himself was perplexed and found it difficult to understand how such departure from the true Gospel had been accepted. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the Grace of Christ unto another Gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Ch. 1:6-7). Twice, he cries "anathema", "let him be accursed", upon anyone who would, "preach any other Gospel" (Ch. 1:8,9). This is not an apostolic malediction but a declaration of the condition of any man who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Epistle to these, "Foolish Galatians", was written urgently to correct this desperate situation. It calls these early Christians from law to grace, from legalism to faith, from circumcision to the cross of Christ. This emphatic statement of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is as relevant today as when originally penned by Paul in emphatic "large letters" (Ch. 6:11).

## OUTLINE

### Chapters 1 and 2 – PERSONAL

The false teachers in Galatia had both discredited Paul and perverted his apostleship and the message he had preached. This, he undertook in chapters 1 and 2. In this autobiographical section Paul proved that his apostleship and Gospel came by obedience to the revelation from the risen Christ.

### Chapters 3 and 4 – DOCTRINAL

In chapters 3 and 4, Paul contends for the true Gospel, the Gospel of the Grace of God which is sufficient for justification by faith alone.

### Chapters 5 and 6 – PRACTICAL

The third section of the Epistle, chapters 5 and 6, shows that Christian liberty does not mean license. He stresses that a believer should live by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the practical reality of salvation will be seen in his or her life, not in the works of the flesh but the fruit of the Spirit.

The teaching of the Epistle may be gathered around the words – law, life, liberty and love. The failure of the law to justify is dealt with in chapter 2. "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Ch. 2:16).

The answer is faith in the Son of God to live. "Crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Ch. 2:20).

This leads to the liberty we have through Christ to stand. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us from, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Ch. 5:1).

The practical section stresses that "the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Ch. 5:22). This is the law of new found life. This is not the nine fruits of the Spirit but the ninefold cluster of fruit, (singular) growing out of "love".

"Joy" is love rejoicing.

"Peace" is love resting.

"Longsuffering" is love enduring.

"Gentleness" is loves expression.

"Goodness" is loves practice.

"Faithfulness" is loves devotion.

“Meekness” is loves humility.

“Temperance” is loves control.

### OBJECTIVE

Satanic attack upon the pure gospel of the New Testament has continued and increased since the early apostolic period. Today, it is fashionable to profess to be saved. Many who make this profession are not really born again. They are not repentant sinners justified by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ, “Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world” (Ch. 1:3-4). In the first century, many added circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law to faith in Christ as conditions for salvation. In the twenty first century, many believe in Christ plus baptism, Christ plus confirmation, Christ plus self-commitment. Modern evangelism presents a feel good factor. Sinners, instead of repenting of their sin, are made to feel good about themselves as they offer their life, their service, their hearts to the Lord. The principle has remained the same, they are trying to be saved by faith plus some works of supposed merit.

Paul says, “I am crucified with Christ”. Christ bore the penalty of the broken law which was death. Crucifixion was despised by the Judaisers. “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”. This is the end of seeking salvation by works of law. As co-crucified, merged with Christ, He is living out His life in me. This “life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Ch. 2:20). The bond is “Love” not “law”. “I do not frustrate (make void) the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Christ died needlessly, His work was not necessary, it was ineffective) (Ch. 2:21). Such was the shocking implications of this Satanic error that Paul cries, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you” (Ch. 3:1).

In chapter 4, Paul shows that they were being led back into bondage. The key to the Epistle is found in chapter 5:1 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage”. These false teachers were as trappers putting out snares for their prey to trip them up (Ch. 6:1). The Galatians were being entrapped, ensnared, turned aside (v9), hindered in the race (Ch. 5:7), held in as with a lasso, a yoke of bondage, the burden of slavery.

The practical outcome of liberty is faith in Christ unto life in the Spirit. In this life, there is no works of the flesh, neither sensual things as fornication, uncleanness or lasciviousness; not sinful things as idolatry, sorcery, nor social things as drunkenness, or revelling and such like as found in chapter 5:19-21. It is only as we live in the dynamic power of the Spirit that we will be given strength to burst all the bonds of the flesh, to fling off the yoke of bondage and to live in the spaciousness of spiritual freedom and the luxury of life by the faith of the Son of God, a bond of “love” not “law”.

Christ Himself is the supreme focus:

Christ and the Cross. Christ is the Sin Bearer (1:4); the Redeemer (3:13; 4:5); the Curse Bearer (3:13); the Seed (3:16); the Son (4:4); the Justifier (2:16; 3:24); the Burden Bearer (6:2).

It is to be observed that the teaching of Galatians is by:

Contrasts: works/grace, flesh/Spirit, Hagar/Sarah, Ishmael/Isaac, etc.

There is frequent use of:

Character Studies from the Old Testament; the faith of Abraham (3:6-29); the Sonship of Isaac (4:21-29); the bondwoman and the freewoman (4:30-31), etc.

### EPHESIANS

The four Epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon written while Paul was in prison are doctrinally and distinctly the Christological Group. Ephesians presents Christ as “Head over all things to the church which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22,23).

The Epistle to, “the saints which are at Ephesus”, is a more impersonal letter of such lofty doctrine that it

has been called the heavenly Epistle. The saints are considered as dwelling, "In heavenly places in Christ" (Ch. 1:3). The Epistle is written and addressed to Ephesus but the apostle intentionally made it suitable to be read in neighbouring assemblies.

### THE SCENE

Paul visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21). He spent three years there on his return (Acts 20:31), when the assembly was formed. The capital city of Asia, it was a port with much industry and the centre of great idolatry (Acts 19:27). In spite of opposition and riots (Acts 19-20; 1Cor. 15:32; 16:8-9) "Mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:20). Those who got saved were mostly Gentiles (Ch. 2:11-19; 3:1), with some Jews, (Acts 18:19; 19:8). The apostle reflects upon the scene of his labours during his meeting with the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38). He warns of dangerous wolves entering among them and reminds them of his toil with tears night and day for those three years. He later sent Timothy (1Tim. 1:3-7) and Tychicus to Ephesus (2Tim. 4:9-12). It is solemn that within the space of one generation this assembly that was so elevated in spiritual riches had left its first love and there was the possibility of the lampstand being removed out of its place (Rev. 2:1-5). The city is now in ruins, of interest only to archaeologists.

The Epistle is not written to meet any specific demand or evident problem among the Ephesians. It is marked by the absence of personal feelings. It is an expression of deep love felt by Paul for his fellow believers both Jew and Gentile. His desire is that they remain steadfast in the faith and rise to enjoy their spiritual wealth and heavenly privileges in Christ Jesus.

The apostle makes it clear that his imprisonment is an integral part of God's purpose concerning him. He was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for them as Gentiles (Ch. 3:1). "Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is [for] your glory" (Ch. 3:13).

### THE SALUTATION

Paul writes as, "An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (Ch. 1:1). God has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Ch. 1:3-6). He writes about the "mystery of His will" (Ch. 1:9) and the "counsel of His own will" (Ch. 1:11). He mentions the revelation and stewardship of this mystery (Ch. 3:1-12), the greatness of the mystery concerning "Christ and the Church" (Ch. 5:32); the "mystery of the Gospel" (Ch. 6:19). The action of God's "will" must be free and Sovereign. The Father's "will" is to have to Himself, many sons bearing the image of His Own Son: as the result of "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ch. 1:7). Calvary is the basis of the great doctrines of the Bible. The church has been a costly purchase. The mystery is God's purpose, that in Christ "Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel" (Ch. 3:6). "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Ch. 5:32).

Our response to the Sovereign Grace of God is not more human comprehension but humble worship. Three times this is stressed in chapter 1. This is "To the praise of the glory of His Grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ch. 1:6). "That we should be to (unto) the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ" (Ch. 1:12). "Ye were sealed with that (the) Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Ch. 1:14). From "Grace" to "Glory", we should give God all the "Praise".

### **The Supremacy of Christ:**

In the Epistle to the Romans we "have died with Christ" (Ch. 6:8); in the Epistle to the Colossians we are "risen with Christ" (Ch. 3:1); and in the epistle to the Ephesians, we are seated "together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ch. 2:6).

In Acts, the theme is upon Christ in Resurrection. In Romans, Christ is our Righteousness. In 1Corinthians it is Christ crucified and in 2Corinthians, we behold Christ glorified. In Ephesians, Christ is exalted at God's right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion. God has; "put

all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Ch. 1:21-23). Paul's prayer rises to a doxology of praise to "the Father of glory", that "the Spirit" of wisdom and understanding may enlighten as to the Ability ("power"), Activity ("working"), Achievement ("under His feet"), to accomplish Authority (above every rank of rule, and every concept of power, all grades of potencies, good and evil, present and future, animate and inanimate, human and angelic). The church is united in Christ in the singular, vital, integral union, "which is His Body" (Ch. 1:23).

The theme of Galatians is Christ our Liberty. The aim of Ephesians is Christ our Victory. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Ch. 6:10). "That ye may be able to stand" (Ch. 6:11). "Be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ch. 6:13). "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness" (Ch. 6:14).

The Epistle to the Ephesians compares with the Old Testament book of Joshua. The inheritance is ours by promise but there are battles to be fought, against the wiles (strategy) of the devil and rulers of the darkness of this world. Let the enemy see the great oblong shield of "faith" in the Lord and the crested "helmet" of salvation. Let us advance into the valley of hostility bearing the pointed two edged "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ch. 6:14-17). "That ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, Which He wrought in Christ" (Ch. 1:18-20).

#### THE SECTIONS

The metaphors of the Church are: Biological, "body" (nine times); Architectural, "Temple" (Ch. 2:21); Matrimonial, "wife" (Ch. 5:21-33); Ethical "Head", (three times) as one with Christ. Christ is the Head of the Body (Ch. 1); we are Members of the Body (Jew and Gentile) (Ch. 2); the Mystery is that the Gentiles are fellowheirs of the same Body, (Ch. 3); this is manifest in Maturity and Unity of walk and warfare, (Ch.'s 4-6).

The epistle has often been entitled, The Wealth, The Walk and The Warfare of the Christian. Christ is the Source of The Wealth (Ch. 1:7); His Sufficiency for the Walk (Ch. 4:1); and The Strength for the Warfare (Ch. 6:10-11).

Doctrinally and Devotionally, the Epistle is clearly divided into two sections:

Theology (Ch.'s 1-3), begins and ends with a doxology – DOCTRINE, Blessings and Calling: The key expression is, "In Christ" – Position.

Ethics (Ch.'s 4-6), the believer is to Walk Worthy (Ch. 4:1), and to Stand Steadfast (Ch. 6:11-14) – DUTY, Battles and Conduct: The key expression is, "in the Lord" – Practice.

The Epistle can be divided into three sections relative to "the Church, which is His Body" in the Heavenly Calling (Ch.'s 1-3); Earthly Conduct (Ch.'s 4:1-6:9); Satanic Conflict (Ch. 6:10-24). This is the church of the age, spoken of by the Lord as a Building (Matt. 16:18), in this Epistle as the Bride (Ch. 5:27).

Another theme in the Epistle is what Paul calls "the Mystery". This does not refer to something that cannot be solved but it is a wonderful truth never revealed before but now made manifest. In chapter 1, we see "The mystery of His will" (1:9) that "we" believing Jews (1:12), and "ye" believing Gentiles (1:12), will share in the dispensation of the fulness of times as His Body and His fulness. In chapter 2 Jews and Gentiles being saved by grace are reconciled, God has broken down the middle wall of partition and made in Himself one new man so making peace (2:15). We find in chapter 3, "The mystery of Christ" (3:4); "The fellowship of the Mystery" (3:9), meaning Christ, the Head and all believers, His Body, "that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same Body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel" (3:6). In chapter 4, Paul deals with the unity, ministry and edifying of the Body of Christ (4:12). He states "This is a great Mystery: but I speak of Christ and the church" in chapter 5:32. This is illustrated in the pattern of the relationship of a husband who loves and cherishes his wife, "even as the Lord, the church" (5:29). In chapter 6, Paul speaks of, "The Mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds" (6:20).

## FURTHER STUDY

Other themes and word study will reward further meditations:

The Work of the Trinity (seven references – Ch.'s 1:17; 2:18,22; 3:4-5, 14-16; 4:4-6; 5:18-20).

The Posture of the Believer: "sit" (Ch. 2:6); "walk" (Ch. 4:1); "stand" (Ch. 6:11).

The Holy Spirit seals, gives access, dwells, reveals, strengthens, unites, empowers, defends and leads in prayer.

The words "peace" (×7) times; "grace" (×12); "glory" (×8); "riches" (×5); "fulness" (×7).

The Epistle begins with "love" (Ch. 1:4) and ends with "love" (Ch. 6:23-24). The verb form of "love", (*agapao*), is used 9 times, the noun (*agapao*) occurs ten times in Ephesians. The apostolic inspiration is predictive of the failure of this church to maintain the vibrancy of their "first love" (Rev. 2:4).

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## The Formation of Assemblies

### **"To observe ALL Things" (Matthew 28:20)**

It is not difficult to discern throughout the Acts of the Apostles that those who were then occupied in the work of God, with a true heart, aimed at the formation of churches, their development and spiritual intelligence, so that each of them might become a worthy corporate testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. They sought the salvation of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, but were never satisfied until they had taught them "to observe all things" (Matt. 28:20).

Not only were they taught that when saved by God's grace they became part of the Church universal which our Lord said He would build upon the Rock (Matt. 16:18), but that it was their privilege to be builded together locally, as were the Ephesians (Ch. 2:22), for a habitation of God through the Spirit, in local corporate testimony.

No intelligent and conscientious worker for God, then or now, would be satisfied to leave those who had been saved through his ministry, without having given them careful instruction from the Word of God, first regarding their individual baptism in confession of their fidelity to Christ as Lord, and then as regards their gathering as a group for united worship, testimony and service. For all of this there is clear guidance in the Word of God, so that no convert need be left to take the path of their choice.

Each assembly, formed as the result of gospel effort, is viewed in the Scriptures as another lampstand of testimony for our absent Lord. The ambition of the apostle Paul was to preach the gospel where hitherto Christ was not named (Rom. 15:20). This resulted in many cases in the salvation of a number of souls. He and others diligently taught these the rudiments of Scripture truth, baptizing them and forming them in a simple way into Christian churches or assemblies.

We who are older and no longer physically fit for the strain of such pioneer work, rejoice with special delight when we learn of such work being undertaken by our younger brethren today. In fact we feel that this "ambition" is declining and requires revival amongst us. How seldom is a young man commended by the assembly with which he is connected because his soul is burdened about a given place, or district, where the gospel is never preached, where souls are perishing who have never heard that they need to be born again, and because they will end in Hell unless warned of the wrath of God coming on sinners!

Are responsible brethren themselves stirred because of those neglected places? Do we pray fervently to the Lord of the Harvest to send forth labourers into His Harvest (Matt. 9:38). And are we willing to stand by

those He might send while they do this pioneer work? Does our failure not begin with our assembly elders? When young men are given encouragement to devote all their time to the spread of the gospel, do these guides press upon them the importance of preaching in new places, enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ? If they neglect this type of work in their youth, to walk the beaten path, what hope is there of them ever turning to it later?

Pioneer work is an essential factor in the development of a “good minister of Jesus Christ” (1Tim. 4:6). It may be easy to supply the theory of caring for lambs and sheep, but books themselves never made a shepherd. He is one who has been present when the lambs were born, who denied himself to make sure they were being properly nourished, protected and cared for, and who has studied the peculiarities of each of his charges.

At times older Christians listen to young men preaching. They cannot but agree that their theology is sound, but as they speak of Scriptural principles to be followed, the duties of elders, the care that shepherds should have for the flock, one question arises in the minds of their audience: is this theory only, or is it “applied science?” Has the speaker experimental knowledge of what he is saying, or is it mere head knowledge? This lack would not be sensed if he had spent years with God in pioneer work. He would have known travail over the souls of men, he would have rejoiced over their spiritual birth, he would have yearned over them to see their growth and development, and he would have searched his spiritual “doctor book” for divine recipes to cure their ills. In doing so, he would himself have grown in true fitness to counsel others. Brethren, shall we not pray God to give us more true pioneers?

The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest. (Matthew 9:37-38)

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## Digging for Treasures from the Word of God

**“... When thou comest, bring ... the books, but especially the parchments”  
(2Timothy 4:13)**

### Useful Reference Manuals

Let us now look at a few valuable reference books that would help us recognize the grandeur and appreciate their preciousness. They will help us to derive the deeper implications of the Scriptures as originally found in the inspired languages.

#### **Newberry Bible** – by Thomas Newberry

This scholarly and user-friendly reference Bible uses the King James Version, and is so arranged to present to the attentive reader the innumerable perfections, beauties and accuracies found in the inspired original languages of the Bible, which cannot be reproduced in any other translation. Newberry, in his introduction say, “But the object of the present work is to put the reader in possession of many of these, by means the most simple, yet most complete, in connection with the (1) Articles, (2) Numbers, (3) Emphatic Pronouns, (4) Tenses, (5) Particles or Prepositions, (6) Uniform and Correct Renderings, (7) Divine Titles and other

particulars". These details are indicated with several symbols to aid the reader to get the right emphasis and beauty found in the original languages. Alternative renderings in the margin with actual Hebrew and Greek words are spelt out along with the meaning.

In the introduction to the Old Testament books, several names for God and man as found in the Hebrew language are listed, which are instructive in nature and revealing. Grammatical information and distinctions for both Hebrew and Greek are given in detail and they have useful and practical value. Thus, if one starts using this Bible, he will be able to derive the richness and the beauty of the plenary inspiration of the original Scriptures.

#### **The Interlinear Bible** – Edited by Jay P. Green, Sr

An Interlinear Bible is now available to students of the Scripture who know English. Through the use of this volume, one can utilize the lexicons, word books and other aids published during recent decades.

The Masoretic Hebrew text for the Old Testament and the original Greek according to the text are followed in the Authorized King James Version for the New Testament. Below every original word, the equivalent English rendering is given. Another literal English translation of the Bible is also provided in a narrow column on the side. It is a straight translation that makes it easy to see the proper word order in the original language and to assimilate the message of the text. All this makes it invaluable. Some difficulties in both the Old Testament and New Testament are explained in brief to enhance the general knowledge of the meaning of the individual Biblical words. It is also keyed to ***Strong's Exhaustive Concordance***.

Through "the majority text notes" for the New Testament that are provided in the appendix, which is a result of many years of study and research, we have a direct comparison between the words that appear in the extant Greek manuscripts. Thus, this Interlinear Bible provides a treasure trove of Bible study and opens up possibilities for those who desire to understand the Scriptures much better.

#### **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible with Hebrew, Chaldee and Greek Dictionaries** – By James Strong

This is not only a concordance to the King James Version of the Bible, but also a Dictionary to the Hebrew and Greek words of the Bible. It gives an appended number, to the leading word in the passage quoted, which is the translation of the Hebrew or Greek words. They are correspondingly numbered in the Dictionaries, given separately for both Hebrew and Greek at the end of the volume. The system has been well accepted by scholars. All modern study books are now being keyed to Strong's reference numbers for usefulness and ready reference.

A lexicon differs from a concordance in that, the latter gives the occurrences of words appearing in the Scriptures, whereas the lexicon is a book that catalogues the form and meaning of such words. Strong's concordance contains certain derivatives of the Hebrew and Greek words as well.

Any person can use the lexical explanations given at the end of the book with profit, whether acquainted with the original language or not, and can derive deeper insight into the correct shade of meaning of the original Bible words. In many cases, how these words were derived from their root is also given.

Thus, anyone who uses ***Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*** diligently will be able to know which were the original Bible words that have been translated into a particular English word and where they are located. He can also find the various other verses in which that particular original word is used by referring to the numbers provided for the lead words in the body of the concordance.

#### **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** – By W.E. Vine

This is a scholarly, authentic and a well accepted reference book. Simple believers and Greek scholars alike can use this most versatile and easy-to-use dictionary. They would find this one of the basic tools of great practical value in understanding the teachings of the New Testament. Commentator Graham Scroggie said of Vine's Dictionary, "It is organized in such a way that it becomes at once a dictionary, a commentary and a concordance".

There are many key words in the Bible such as “propitiation” and “redemption”. Our modern thinking would give us limited and likely incorrect information to precisely define such Scriptural truths. W.E. Vine bridges the gap with his Greek scholarship. Prof. F.F. Bruce describes it as “wide, accurate, and up-to-date”. At the same time it is concise, readable and understandable.

In this dictionary, Vine has arranged over 6000 English words alphabetically. Under each word he lists out original Greek words. These Greek words are given both in the English phonetic equivalents of the Greek, as well as in the original Greek itself. This is followed by its precise definition and meaning. These words are grouped by parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). For example under the English word ‘darkness’ there are four nouns, two adjectives and two verbs. After each definition different groupings of the original word are given by usage. Each of these groupings is then illustrated with various Scripture passages. The value of these groupings cannot be over estimated. For example, for the word “day” provided in the commentary, it differentiates between the “*Day of the Lord*”, the “*Day of God*” and the “*Day of Christ*”.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits we get from this is that it includes a short commentary by Vine himself, as well as quotations from others, for further understanding of the words and their usages. It also provides much needed historical and cultural information. At the end, an addendum on important distinctions of some participles and prepositions is given, and is truly very valuable. An index of the Greek words in the Bible and all the English words into which they have been translated is also provided.

#### **New Wilsons Old Testament Word Studies – By William Wilson**

This resource, *Old Testament Word Studies*, provides the student a trusted collection, what **Vine’s Expository Dictionary** is for the New Testament. It unfolds the Hebrew Old Testament, being both a dictionary and concordance. All words are listed alphabetically in English and are easy to use. The words dealt with are keyed to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance and to the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*. It also contains an English and Hebrew index, a brief introduction to Hebrew and a listing of certain words that are used to make witty puns in the Old Testament.

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## **The Death of Christ Reconciles to God**

Most of the terms which the word of God employs to designate vital spiritual realities are little understood by men generally today. It is futile to speak, for example, of sanctification; it is foreign language to most, for they are quite ignorant of the Bible and its sacred teachings. How important it is to remember this in preaching the gospel; and to address an audience as explaining to benighted sinners the way of salvation, not as lecturing a class of theological students!

One term, however, is possibly better understood today than ever before, though for the most unhappy of reasons, namely reconciliation. Because of the prevalence of broken marriages, divided homes, industrial and political strife etc., the word reconciliation is more commonly used today than it used to be. But although the term itself may be better understood, the meaning of the spiritual and divine truth conveyed by it in the Scripture is little understood, even by God’s people.

The basic New Testament verb is “*katallasso*” which means to make different, to change, to exchange (as of

money). Also used is a strengthened form "*apokatallasso*" and an alternative form "*diallasso*" (Matt. 5:24).

Because the fundamental idea is one of change, it has frequently been assumed that since God is essentially immutable, i.e. incapable of change, reconciliation must be a change in man. Moreover, it is argued, since God in His essential nature is love, and consequently has never been hostile to man, reconciliation must be the removal of man's hostility to God, and the production of a submissive and amenable spirit within him. Not only is this reasoning shallow, it is at variance with the New Testament presentation of the truth.

Reconciliation is regarded in the New Testament basically as something accomplished by Christ on the cross, not as something accomplished by the Holy Spirit within the heart of man. The whole world is seen as reconciled to God (Rom. 11:15; 2Cor. 5:19); but the world's attitude to God has not changed. Certainly man's attitude to God must be changed if he is to be saved, but that change is not reconciliation, it is repentance (Greek "*metanoia*", a change of mind or thought). The truth is that reconciliation is not a change in God's essential nature, for that is impossible; neither is it a change in man's attitude, for that is defined in other terms; it is rather a change in the relationship between God and man, and more specifically a change in the status or position of man in relation to God.

Although God loves His sinful creatures, He is opposed to them in law. Because they have sinned against His holy character and transgressed His holy law, He is obliged to take the place of their Adversary in all judicial proceedings. In the language of the ancient prophetic formula He has to say, "I am against thee ..." He must stand against men, accuse them, condemn them, and finally punish them. This He is constrained to do, as much by the demands of His own essential Being, as by the unalterable decrees of His holy law. If God is at times obliged to become man's enemy in a practical sense in discipline (Lev. 26:17,23-24,28,30; 1Sam. 28:16; Psalm 18:26; Jer. 21:4-5,10; Ezek. 21:2-3), so is He obliged at all times to be man's adversary forensically, unless and until reconciliation is made. This means that a righteous basis must be found upon which God can satisfy the holy demands of His nature, His throne and His law, so that He is no longer obliged by these to stand against the sinner and demand his punishment, but rather can bring the sinner into the sunshine of His favour and grace. And this is just what the cross of Christ has done.

Apart from any change in man whatsoever, the cross has permitted an unchangeable God to change His dispensational dealings with man from law to grace. Instead of seeking man's punishment as his legal adversary, God is now able in a perfectly legal way to draw man to Himself and to offer freely all the infinite blessings of His favour. And the cross of Christ has brought the whole world into this place. In being reconciled to God in this objective sense the world is not saved, but it is brought into that state of favour in which it can be saved. The sunshine of God's saving grace shines upon all men everywhere. It is in this sense that the world is changed or reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

Inasmuch as God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but delights in mercy, we may appreciate a little of what the accomplishment of this reconciliation means to the heart of God. Indeed it was God Himself who in His infinite love to lost mankind purposed, planned and effected this reconciliation in the Person of His Son (2Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:19-22) for the infinite satisfaction of His own heart's desires, as well as the glory of His name and the blessing of mankind. This is why God is never said to be reconciled in Scripture, and not because He is love, nor because there is no hostility on His part towards man, as is frequently suggested. God is not said to be reconciled, firstly because He is the One who has done the work of reconciling, and secondly because it is the offender who is reconciled to the offended one, not vice-versa. Man is reconciled to God; God is not reconciled to man. God reconciles, man is reconciled, this is the consistent teaching of Scripture. So reconciliation is basically a Godward aspect of the death of Christ, though it has a subjective man-ward counterpart as we may see in a moment.

It is very instructive to compare the few instances of reconciliation on the human plane in Scripture. In 1Samuel 29:4 the Philistine princes think of David as one who has offended his master Saul, and they say, "Wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master?" In Matthew 5:23-24 the Lord speaks of one who has offended his brother, and He says, "Go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother". Then in 1Corinthians 7:11 Paul speaks of the wife who has left her husband and decrees, "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband". These are the three instances of reconciliation on the human

level, and in each case it is the one who is supposed to be responsible for the breach who is expected to accomplish the reconciliation. The offender is expected to go to the one who has been offended and to be reconciled to him by reconciling himself (or herself). This is surely reasonable; the one who made the breach should heal it. But when we come to the Gospel doctrine of reconciliation to God it is the very opposite, and how thankful we should be that it is so!

If reconciliation to God depended upon man, the sinner, healing the breach, it would never be accomplished, and for two reasons. Firstly man could not do it, and secondly he does not will to do it. The work of reconciliation requires the provision of a righteous basis, namely the putting away of sin – the cause of the breach – and the making of a perfect atonement; but this is something totally beyond the capacity of ruined man. It is a work so infinitely great and costly that only the Almighty could accomplish it.

But secondly, man in his nature is hostile to God and a rebel against Him. He wants his own way, and has no desire to be reconciled to his Sovereign. So an offended God has come out in infinite grace to do for man what man was morally responsible to do for himself, but which he was neither able nor willing to do. While man remained aloof and unchanged in his hostility (Col. 1:21), God in love moved to make possible the removing of the barrier and the reception into His favour of His implacable foes.

In studying the various aspects of reconciliation in the New Testament, we may differentiate between reconciliation made, reconciliation proclaimed, and reconciliation received.

Reconciliation was made at the cross. It is a fundamental aspect of the sacrificial work of Christ. See Romans 5:6-10; 2Cor. 5:18,21; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:19-22. Hebrews 2:17 is a mistranslation, the word there should be “propitiation”.

Romans 5:6-10 teaches us that the death of God’s incarnate Son is the basis and means of reconciliation. When men were alienated from God by sin, hating God and hateful to God, He gave the One He loved best up to death to draw man to Himself. This is also seen in 2Corinthians 5:17-21. Instead of reckoning to men their trespasses and coming out upon them in wrath and judgement, God rather sought to reconcile man to Himself, to purchase at infinite cost the legal and moral right to be gracious. This could only be done by reckoning sin to the perfectly sinless One. As a consequence the personal benefits of receiving this reconciliation are justification on the judicial plane, and new creation on the moral plane.

The basis of reconciliation in Ephesians 2:16 is “the cross”, the only reference to the cross in this epistle. Inasmuch as crucifixion was a Roman mode of execution, the cross is the symbol of the unity of Jew and Gentile in hostility to God and His Christ. How wonderful that that which unites them in opposition to God should become the very means whereby God unites Jew and Gentile in reconciliation to God! In being reconciled to God upon the same basis, erstwhile antagonistic factions of humanity are reconciled to one another. But the cross is also that aspect of Christ’s death which sees the end of man in the flesh; so once again reconciliation is linked with new creation; but this time dispensationally. The “new man” that “is created” is the church. In Christ and in His body is full reconciliation enjoyed, to God and to one another. The fruit of reconciliation is described as “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (v18).

In Colossians 1:20-21 the means is the cross, the manner is “making peace”, and the result is new creation, though the phrase is not used. The scope of reconciliation in Ephesians 2 is the church, the “one body”; in Romans 11 and 2Corinthians 5, it is the world; here it is “all things”, the widest possible scope. “Things on earth” are included, so are “things in heaven”, but not “things under the earth”. For “the all things” of verse 20, compare verse 16 and see “Death of Christ” (TOP № 28). This is one of those brief and enigmatical references to the cosmic consequences of the death of Christ which gives us a passing glimpse into the wealth and wonder of His sacrificial work without satisfying our curiosity, leaving us to worship where we cannot fully comprehend. In this sense reconciliation is the bringing of things back into right and harmonious relationships with God, speaking not so much of the blessing of the creature as of the recovery to the Creator of His rights and His pleasure in that which has been estranged from Him by sin. The effects of reconciliation are therefore as wide as the effects of sin. How significant that the Agent of reconciliation is the Agent of creation (“through Him” vs. 16,20). But if reconciliation in verse 20 is universal, in verse 21, it is personal.

The occasion of reconciliation is brought before us in Romans 11. Here it is linked with the setting aside of Israel as a nation, in connection with the figure of the olive tree. The breaking off of the natural branches gives the opportunity for the grafting in of the branches of the wild olive. This is reconciliation viewed dispensationally. The setting aside or casting away of Israel, their excision from their exclusive place of favour, gives the opportunity for “the reconciling of the world” (v15 ff.), i.e. the bringing of the world into the place of Gospel opportunity and favour.

This is seen in the proclamation of “that reconciliation” (2Cor. 5:18b,19b – J.N.D. i.e. that reconciliation effected by God in Christ at the cross) which is sent to all nations. As “ambassadors for Christ” the preachers of the gospel are sent throughout the whole world with “the ministry of reconciliation”. And the message in a nutshell is, “Be ye reconciled to God”.

Perhaps this expression would have been better understood if Romans 5:11 had been more happily translated; “through whom (our Lord Jesus Christ) we have now received the reconciliation (A.V. atonement)”. There is no objection to “atonement” in what is probably the original meaning of the word, at-one-ment, for that is synonymous with reconciliation. But for the sake of consistency, especially with the previous verse, and to avoid confusion, “reconciliation” is far better. Reconciliation has to be received, and this is the element of human responsibility. So the appeal “Be ye reconciled to God” is not a call to man to make his peace with God, but an entreaty to receive the reconciliation He has made, and to come personally in to the enjoyment of the divine favour which the substitutionary sufferings of Christ have made possible.

It will be noted that the passage in 2Corinthians 5, covers expressly all three aspects of reconciliation. They are also covered, though not expressly, by Ephesians 2:16-18. In other passages it is assumed that the reconciliation made at Calvary has been received, and is brought to full fruition in the bringing nigh to God of those to whom reference is made, and in their consequent experience of “peace with God” and “joy in God” (Rom. 5:1,11).

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## MEN OF GOD SERIES

### (3) ABEL : GOD TESTIFYING OF HIS GIFTS

#### **“Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice” (Hebrews 11:4)**

In the great portrait gallery of faith the first name mentioned is that of the man ever associated with sacrifice. Enoch *walked* with God; Noah was *warned* of God, Abraham *went* out for God, but Abel *worshipped* God.

The narrative is short but his fragrance remains.

His life was brief yet he lives on.

No words that he uttered are recorded but he still “speaketh”.

The Lord described the first martyr as; “Righteous Abel” (Matt. 23:35).

This early lesson from our Bible is that God is to be worshipped. The primary privilege of faith is to worship God through the offering (1<sup>st</sup> mention) and death of a victim. We need to learn that worship is giving not getting, ascribing not appropriating, blessing God not blessing ourselves, the emphasis is on the character not the cost. The wording is to be noted; “And the Lord had respect unto Abel (the offerer) and to his offering” (Gen. 4:4). The LORD said, “True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

The chapters of Genesis are not biographies of great men. We are not reading the details of historical

events seen after Creation and the Fall, in fact we are not told many details because we do not need to know them. These chapters reveal the workings of God in human affairs to accomplish His great work of Redemption. God has not abandoned His first thoughts relative to Creation but His Sabbath of rest has been disturbed by sin. Through His Son, the promised seed, God is unfolding the great programme of Redemption which He had planned before the world began.

For a **presentation** to God: Abel brought of the firstling of his flock, (Gen. 4:4).

When **provision** was required: Abraham said, "God will provide Himself a Lamb" (Gen. 22:6).

When **protection** was needed: Moses said, "Your Lamb shall be without blemish" (Ex. 12:5).

When **peace** was to be made: Israel drew near in the good of the Lamb of the peace offering (Lev. 3:7).

The **prophet** foretold; "He is brought as a Lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7).

John Baptist, **pointed** and said: "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

The **programme** of Redemption has reached out in the N.T.; "Not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver or gold ... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pet. 1:18-19).

Heavens **praise** to the lamb shall be: "Thou art worthy ... for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood" (Rev. 5:9).

"The LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (Gen. 4:3)

"Respect" means acceptance, approval, God's favour, God's regard for the offerer and his offering. Abel would have learned as a boy why his parents were driven from Paradise. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). The wages of sin is death; separation from God. The way back to God must be by the way of death. This is a repentant sinner placing the death of the victim between himself and the consequences of his sin before God. Sin and the fall brought a great chasm from God by the distance of death. Faith recognises the fact of sin; repentance acknowledges the just penalty of sin and the requirement for the death of a substitutionary victim. "Without [the] shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Without blood the edifice of salvation has no foundation. Without blood the structure of propitiation has no keystone. Without blood we have no Gospel.

"Respect" has the thought of propitiation rather than justification. God has found satisfaction in the death of Christ and has raised Him from the dead. "The redemption that is in Christ Jesus; Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith, (punctuation) in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past" (Rom. 3:24-25). God saved O.T. saints in view of Calvary, even as He had respect unto Abel and to his offering.

"God testifying of his gifts" (plural) (Heb. 11:4). This indicates the continual, habitual practise of Abel's approach. "The firstlings of his flock"; the firstborn, choicest, he gave the best to God. "The fat thereof"; a burnt offering unto God. This gave a standing of imputed righteousness before God. He was a son of God. "He being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4). Does this anticipate resurrection?

"The blood of righteous Abel" (Matt. 23:35)

The first martyr suffered because of his testimony to the necessity of the death of a victim. The first martyr of the church age died because of his witness to the truth of resurrection.

Sin ruined the first man and stirred the second man to slay the third man.

The name "Abel" means "vapour", breath, soon passing, hence mounting into a higher atmosphere. This was true of his short fleeting life.

He was, "A keeper (feeder) of sheep" (Gen. 4:2). At an early stage Abel choose a pastoral, peaceful lifestyle, providing the basics of life, food and clothing. A shepherd is one of the most frequently used metaphors in Scripture, later developed with fondness in Hebrew writings and prophetic of the Lord Himself (John 10:11).

The N.T. references to Abel all emphasise that he was righteous. "He obtained witness that he was righteous" (Heb. 11:4). Cain slew his brother; "Because his own works were evil, and his brothers righteous" (1John 3:12). The Lord Himself referred to; "The blood of righteous Abel" (Matt. 23:35).

"I will put enmity between thee (the serpent) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). In subsequent chapters in Genesis, the inspired writer traces two lines, two ways and two races of humanity. The character of the devil is seen in Cain, he was a murderer (Gen. 4:8), and a liar (Gen. 4:9). The serpent was the source of ruin. The seed of the woman was the seed of redemption. In the rest of the book the emphasis is not on the details but on the difference between the two lines of men. Evil is exposed and dealt with in brevity, then the good is expanded to the glory of God. The pattern is to increasingly develop the line of faith manifest in the men of God: Abel (10 verses) to Joseph (13 chapters).

Cain tilled the cursed ground. Soon the stained earth was hiding from sight the awful evidence of fratricide. "Thy brother's blood (plural) crieth unto Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). This cried to God, the avenger of murder. Pollution of the land by the shedding of the blood of the innocent, for which there was no expiation, drove Israel into exile. "Cain went out from the presence of the LORD" (Gen. 4:16). Cain believed in God, and evidently went to a specific place of worship to present his offering and sought acceptance in a spirit of selfhood and satisfaction with his own produce. He now goes out to cultivate the cursed earth and to improve conditions without God, outside of Paradise, taking steps to circumvent his punishment. "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain" (Jude 11).

His descendants seek to make a ruined world happy without God; building cities called after the names of their sons; establishing a society in murderous defiance of God, saying where is the God of judgement? Tubal-Cain was an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron. These are basic metals characteristic of the image of the last world empire of end times with feet of iron and clay. Sin drove man from Eden, "Where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good" (Gen. 2:11-12). The carnal still seek to improve this world that has rejected God. The God-fearing, "Call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26). The line of Seth were the sons of God. As believers, we identify by faith with the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism. Bearing reproach with Christ, the spiritual handle gold, silver, and precious stones reaching out to the new earth of the covenant sealed rainbow.

"He being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4)

Abel's life and death speak to us of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the Good Shepherd; "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). His blood crimsoned the soil of earth in the garden of Gethsemane, (Luke 22:44). Pilate, "Knew that for envy they had delivered Him" (Matt. 27:18). Pilate said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. ... Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:24,25). Cain would not slay the blood of the offering but he would stain his hand in his brother's blood. Such was the horrendous choice of the nation.

Christ is the promised seed. In Him is the Secret of Life, promised to Eve, Abraham and David. He is the Source of Life; "In Him was life" (John 1:4). He is the Substance of Life; "I give unto them eternal life" (John 10:28). This is the Harvest at Calvary; "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24).

The voice of the first martyr, whose life seemed to be prematurely cut off, speaks though the risen Lord. We come; "To Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).

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## Questions and Answers

**Question:** “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2). “For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5). Please explain what seems to be a contradiction?

**Answer:** The word translated “burdens” in verse 2, is “*baros*”, loads, heavy weights. The exhortation is to keep sharing, carrying, put your shoulder under another’s weight or trial. Perhaps help him overcome his weakness, his temptation before he stumbles and falls, “be overtaken in a fault”, verse 1. “One another’s”, indicates mutual burden bearing and if necessary acceptance of the help of others. The context is oppression. Each is to be conscious that they are vulnerable themselves, prone to be tripped up at any unguarded moment. There are difficulties, trials and sorrows which are too heavy for individuals to shoulder. There were some among the Galatians that sought to impose the burden of ceremonial law keeping. These were the wrong kind of burdens.

The world translated “burden” in verse 5 is “*phortion*”, in the sense of responsibility, something borne irrespective of weight, as the pack carried by a marching soldier or a ship’s cargo. The word is used by the Lord Himself. “For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). The previous verse may indicate that at the Judgement Seat, one shall answer for one’s self and not for someone else. The responsibility in verse 6, is to communicate to the temporal needs of the teacher having oneself been “taught in the Word”.

Who His Own self bare our sins in His Own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness by Whose strips ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1Peter 2:24-25)

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**What is your Life? ...** (James 4:14)

**What shall it profit a man ...?** (Mark 8:36-37)

**What think ye of Christ? ...** (Matthew 22:42)

Ongoing world conditions have seemingly caused some to stop and think seriously about the more important and fundamental issues of life: Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? Where is the world heading? However, many more remain indifferent about mankind’s fickleness in the face of such distress. The Bible often presents questions to provoke thought and to stir us into action about vital matters as above and likewise provides the answers that cannot be found elsewhere. If we are as concerned as we should be, acting appropriately to the following questions will secure God’s salvation for our souls.

## What is your life?

If this question was asked to 100 different people, there could be as many different answers. What word would you use to summarise your life? Some may use happy, carefree, exiting, fulfilling. Others would have to confess unhappy, lonely, empty or even hopeless. You might think it strange that this question is found in the Bible. The answer is also given, ***“it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away”***. Have you ever watched the vapour rising up from the surface of boiling water? It only lasts a few seconds before it disappears. The Bible reminds us that this is just like our lives and would exhort us elsewhere that, ***“it is time to seek the LORD”*** (Hosea 10:12). A poet aptly described the brevity of life as follows:

When as a child I crawled and wept ... time crept  
When as a youth I laughed and talked ... time walked  
When I became a full grown man ... time ran  
As daily still I older grew ... time flew  
Soon shall I find in travelling on ... time gone  
And face eternity begun ... time done!

## What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

For many, it is just a vain imagination to be very wealthy and to be able to acquire all the material possessions that money could buy, yet many relentlessly pursue such a dream. Vast amounts are spent each week on various forms of lotteries and gambling as people long for material prosperity and fulfilment driven by the yearnings of their carnal desires. Many others through hard work and business ventures seek to achieve the same. The Lord Jesus Christ asked the above searching question to challenge His hearers and us today and continued by asking, ***“And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”***. Have we failed to grasp that our souls (the real me) is infinitely more valuable than all the riches in the world we could collect. Many who lust and heap up such temporal and corrupting riches, will one day find themselves for ever lost in Hell with no means to extract themselves from such a place of torment. How solemn when eternal salvation was once within their grasp! Such cravings will keep us from Christ, from His salvation and from ensuing effectual service for Him. Have you given this any thought? Another poet wrote:

The clock of life is wound but once, and no one has the power,  
To tell just when the hand will stop, at late or early hour;  
To lose your wealth is sad indeed, to lose your health is more,  
To lose your soul is such a loss, as no one can restore!

## What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He?

This personal question asked by Christ to the religious people of His day is the greatest of all and requires an answer. Who is Jesus Christ and what does He mean to you? Some acknowledge Him to be a mere historical figure who did good deeds and helped people. Others are dismissive and find him totally irrelevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the Bible many testimonies are give about Him, from both enemies and friends, including: ***“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”***; ***“Truly this was the Son of God”***; ***“In Him is no sin”***; ***“Never man spoke like this Man”***; ***I find in Him no fault at all”***; ***“This man hath done nothing amiss”***. We need right thoughts of Christ; the Bible alone presents the truths concerning this unique Man.

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The three questions briefly considered are personal and need a response. Life’s brevity is undeniable! All the riches in the world cannot be compared to the values of one soul. Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh. His death on a Roman cross over 2000 years ago is significant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He died so that sinners can be forgiven and know peace with God, their Maker. Through repentance and faith in Him, God can justly forgive and pardon you from all sin. The only way to Heaven is through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Contrary to many religious teachings of the day, good works, giving to charities, being neighbourly, although commendable, cannot blot out sin to gain a person’s acceptance with God and an

entrance into Heaven. ***“The blood of Jesus Christ His (God’s) Son cleanses us from all sin”*** (1John 1:7). Nothing else will do! Are you ready for your day of departure from this world to face God having being made acceptable through Christ alone?

The Bible gives assurance that, ***“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”*** (Romans 10:9).

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