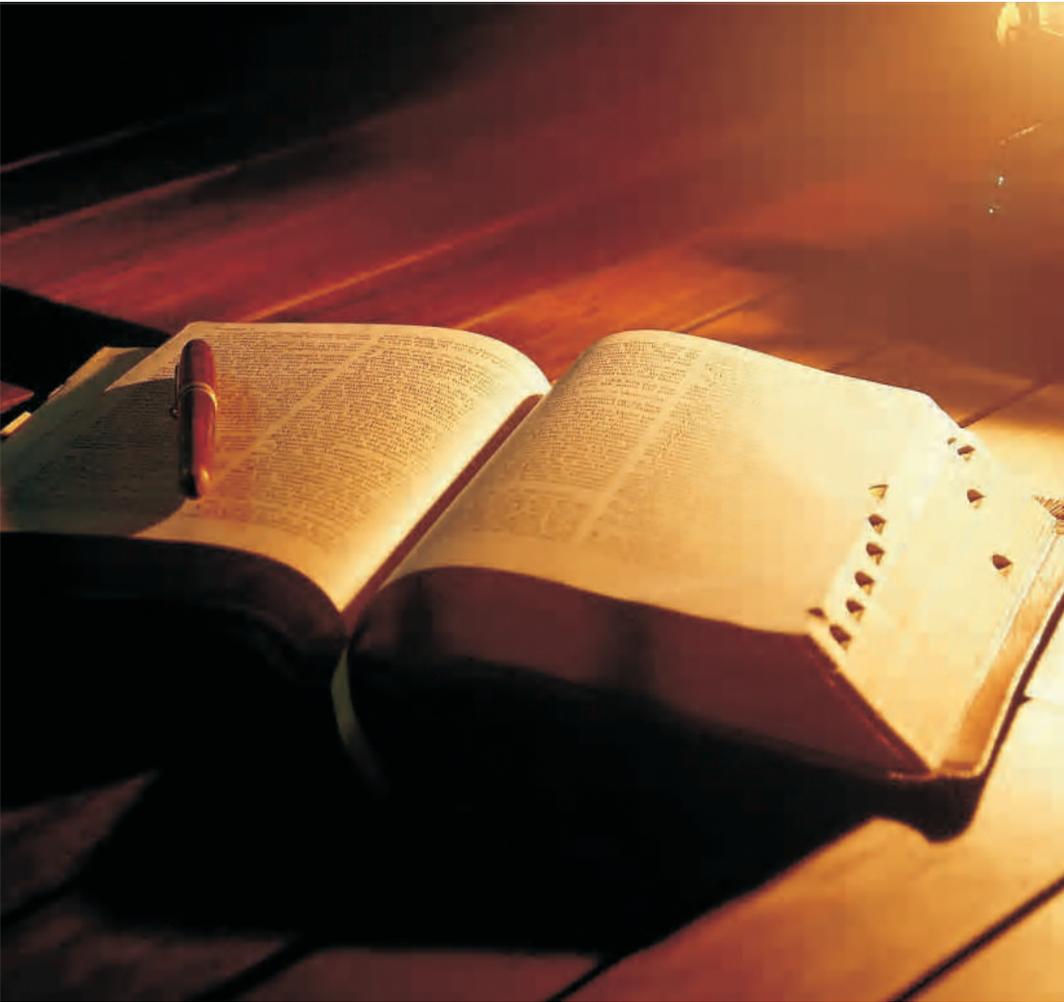




THE OLD PATHS

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The Old Paths

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Contents

Editorial – Give Attendance to Reading	J.A. Davidson	146
The Flood (6)	J.A. Brown	147
The Coming of the Lord in 1Thessalonians	T.J. Blackman	151
The Acts of the Apostles (Ch 5:12-28)	Ian McKee	155
The Local Assembly (7)(i) – The Purity	J.A. Davidson	160
Misinterpreted Texts	R. Davidson	164
God Give us Men	A.W. Joyce	166
The Inspiration of Scripture	Phillip Harding	169
Paul’s Metaphors (9) Astronomy : The Glory of the Celestial	J.A. Davidson	174
The Servant of God	N.J. Jeyanandam	176
Psalms 2	Cliff Jones	183
Help for Young Believers (3)	—	189
Questions and Answers	—	191
Being now justified by His blood...	—	—

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth ... So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11)



From the Editor's Desk

“Give attendance to reading...” (1Tim. 4:13)

“Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1Tim. 4:13). Paul the apostle advised young Timothy to attend to, or give heed to the reading of the Scriptures. W.E.Vine states, this pursuit “suggests devotion of thought and effort”. The desire of the heart is certainly necessary and applicable for the private as well as the public reading of the Bible. The acquired habit will undoubtedly enhance spiritual enrichment and development. It is vital that a believer in Christ should get to know his or her God through the reading of His Word.

Notice the six imperatives used in 1Timothy 4:13 to 16; things that we must do: “Give attendance to; Neglect not; Meditate upon; Give thyself wholly; Take heed; Continue”. If we are to follow Paul’s advice tenaciously, we will be preserved from much evil and sin that are prevalent in the world, and, we will be guided to order our lives according to His Word.

The force of the text is: “Give attendance to the reading, to the exhortation, to the doctrine (teaching)”.

THE READING: Timothy was to engage in the private and public reading and dissemination of the truth. “A good minister (deacon, one who serves) of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” [what thou hast followed until now – RV] (1Tim. 4:6).

THE EXHORTATION: Publically address the needs of the believers giving encouragement from the Scriptures to reach their will and

practical life. “Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1Tim. 4:12).

THE DOCTRINE: To teach the Scriptures, enlightening the hearers as to the body of Truth. “That thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith” (1Tim. 1:3-4). “Meditate upon these things”. This involves mental and spiritual discipline to study, think on, and ponder the Scriptures and take the teaching into ones heart and soul. “Give thyself wholly to them”. That is be in them, absorbed, engrossed, wrapped up in the truth of the Word.

“That thy profiting (progress, advancement) may appear to all.” “Profiting” is a military term meaning to advance and strike forward. What has been gained by reading in private will be clearly witnessed in public life and doctrine with the result that others will profit.

THE FLOOD (6)

J.A. Brown

In the previous article we saw how the character of Noah was in complete contrast to the character of the men and women of his day. Noah *stood-out* for God! His godly conduct afforded us many spiritual lessons that *could* (and *should*) be applied to our present day!

In these next few articles we shall (D.V.) view the Ark as a *type of Christ* and the *believers' salvation in Christ*, noting also the passage of the Ark through the waters as a *figure of baptism* (1Pet. 3:20-21). These subjects are obviously all closely linked together!

Divine Provision.

The Ark was God's means of escape / salvation from coming judgement. God's purposes were revealed to Noah *before* the first drop of rain fell from the sky. So there existed in God's mind a plan of escape – this was no afterthought in response to changing circumstances! In a similar way, there ever existed in the eternal councils of the Godhead a plan of salvation through Christ (Eph. 1:4) – long before sin had ever come into this scene. *Our* salvation was not a spur of the moment decision – before *we* were created God knew the *cost* of providing *our* salvation through Christ and yet He was still willing to provide it!

Divine Design and Dimensions.

We noted in Genesis 6:14-16 how God gave clear, specific *details of design* for the building of the Ark. Similarly the O.T. gives us clear, specific *details* (prophetically) about our Lord Jesus Christ, e.g. *where* (Micah 5:2), *why* (Isaiah 53:10), *how* (Isaiah 7:14) and possibly *when* (Dan. 9) He should be born!

This structure was in the mind of God *alone* – it had nothing to do with Noah's intelligence or thoughts. God planned and designed it and Noah built it. Even the Ark's *dimensions* speak of Christ. The reader is encouraged to think of $300 \times 50 \times 30$ cubits (Gen. 6:15) and the possible spiritual significance – *300* is associated with *victory and deliverance* (Judges 7:7) and *consistency* (Gen. 5:22); *50* reminds us of *Pentecost* and *anointing* (Lev. 23:15-17 & Acts 2); *30* speaks of *full stature, authority* and *maturity* (1Kings 6:2; Gen. 41:46; 2Samuel 5:4 and Luke 3:23). Each of these aspects could be developed in respect to Christ and are worth studying in more depth.

Divine Materials.

The Ark was to be made of "*gopher wood*". An important lesson lies before us in this fact – i.e. life comes out of death and that life can be secured only by sacrifice. [This principle is seen elsewhere in scripture e.g. the corn of wheat dying and then being fruitful (John 12:24)]. Before the Ark could be made (and therefore before salvation

became available) then trees had to be first cut-down. Noah's means of escape from coming judgement was secured as a result of this, clearly illustrating the absolute necessity of the death (and resurrection) of Christ in order that our salvation might be procured. We also notice that the trees from which the wood of the Ark was taken were growing on Earth. So Christ, the co-eternal, co-existent and co-equal Son of God, was found on Earth as a perfect man and as such (in the language of the O.T.) was *cut-off* (Isaiah 53:8 and Daniel 9:26).

Divine Invitation and Presence.

Noah was *directly* and *personally* (with his family) invited into the Ark (Gen. 7:1), assuring him not only of safety and security, but also of God's presence within. The verse suggests God's presence would be *in* the Ark at all times. If the Ark is a type of Christ, then we can apply the verse, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself..." (2Cor. 5:19). God said "*come*" to Noah – not "*go*"! This was a gracious invitation to come to find deliverance in the presence and provision of God. "*Go*" might have suggested Noah moving away from God's presence.

Divine Refuge from Divine Judgement.

Not only was Noah in a place of *safety* provided by God from the coming judgement, but he was in the only place of safety / refuge. (So also with our Lord Jesus Christ; see Acts 4:12). Think of the Arks mentioned in the Bible – *three* come immediately to mind, these being Noah's Ark, the ark of the bulrushes (Moses) and the Ark of the Covenant. Noah's Ark sheltered those within from the wrath and judgement of God; the ark of the bulrushes protected the baby Moses from Pharaoh's designs (Pharaoh being a type of Satan) and the Ark of the Covenant sheltered the two tables of stone on which the law of God was written. Combining all *three* as possible pictures of Christ, we see the believer is sheltered from Divine judgement (not judgement by water, but by eternal, unquenchable fire), from Satan's designs and assaults and from condemnation by God's law.

Divine Security and Atonement.

Genesis 6:14 reminds us that the Ark was pitched “*within and without with pitch*”. Provision was made for it to be absolutely watertight. Whatever transpired outside the Ark, there was absolute security *inside*. One of the applications of Colossians 3:3 is the absolute security of the believer in Christ. Genesis 7:16 tells us “*and the LORD shut him in*” – God provided this way of escape and God would care for Noah and his family *within* this way of escape! Again, on reading Genesis 8:18-19 we notice that *all* that went *into* the Ark also came *out of* the Ark – none had perished inside!! Those that had entered by faith, they stayed in – none were lost en-route! Once saved, then always saved! (John 18:9).

The Hebrew word for “*pitch*” in Genesis 6:14 is an unusual one, this being its first usage in the O.T. This particular word literally means “*atonement*”, and is used 70 times elsewhere in the O.T. – it is used in connection with each of the five offerings mentioned in Leviticus, and of the offering of the ram for consecration for the high priest and his family (Ex. 29:33). The reader should look-up a *very important* reference to the word “*atonement*” in Leviticus 17:11. Atonement was made by blood for a covering for sin. The pitching “*within and without*” brought security for those *inside*, the pitch making the Ark proof against the judgement waters of God *outside*. The great storm of Divine judgement fell on the Ark *alone*, not on those sheltered within! The Lord Himself bore the anguish of Divine wrath and judgement against sin *alone*, so that *we* might *never* experience it!

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 stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop (Overseer) of your souls. (1Peter 2:24,25)

The Coming of the Lord in 1Thessalonians

T.J. Blackman

Because of persecutions, Paul needed to leave Thessalonica just a few weeks after the conversion of the people who now formed the assembly in that city. As a result, it had not been possible to give them much instruction. It is remarkable, however, how many aspects of the truth the Thessalonians already understood, including various matters connected with prophecy. It seems that the second coming of the Lord Jesus especially held their attention, although they probably did not yet understand this subject perfectly with respect to the rapture of the church. Therefore, the Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul to mention the return of Christ in each chapter of this first Epistle. Each time the apostle gives yet another reason why the hope of the Lord's coming is so blessed (Titus 2:13).

The Hope of His Coming Assures us of Deliverance Instead of the Expectation of Wrath.

"... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1:9-10). The conversion of the Thessalonians was not merely the change from one religion to another. They left the meaningless worship of idols, and all the emptiness and immorality which accompanied it, to live the holy life of those who have eternal life in Christ Jesus and worship the Father in spirit and truth. God is angry with the wicked every day and will manifest His wrath in due time. To Him all idols are "abominations", and fornicators and adulterers "God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). But now the life and prospects of these converts had changed completely. They no longer feared the future. Now they awaited the coming of God's Son to deliver them from the wrath to come.

The Hope of His Coming Promises Everlasting Joy After Affliction.

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy” (2:19-20). Here in chapter 2 Paul speaks of his own hope. This chapter says a lot about the afflictions and trials of God’s servants in the work of the gospel. Paul and Silas had already suffered much at Philippi (see Acts 16), and then in Thessalonica there was opposition yet again. The new believers had suffered much persecution as well, and were still suffering it. However, both he and they could contemplate the future with great joy.

On the eve of His own sufferings the Lord Jesus had said to His disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). Paul anticipates the day when both the evangelist and his converts will enter together into “the joy of their Lord”. It was also the Lord’s prayer on that night, “That they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves ... that they ... be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory” (John 17:13,24). In spite of their tribulations, the saints enjoy many foretastes of that joy and glory. But here, at the end of 1Thessalonians 2, Paul expresses the certainty of his expectation of standing together with the fruits of his laborious service in the presence of the Lord Jesus when He comes.

“At His coming” obviously does not indicate just the moment of His coming. We understand that the word “coming” in the Greek text indicates both His arrival and His consequent presence with His own. Therefore, we may be sure that it will not be just a moment of joy at His return, but rather, glory and joy from that moment and for evermore “in the presence of our Lord”.

The Hope of His Coming Incites to Holiness in a World of Temptation.

“The Lord make you to increase and abound in love ... To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints”

(3:12-13). The apostle was very concerned about the Thessalonians because their faith still needed to be strengthened. Faith has a powerful enemy, and Paul was afraid that the tempter had tempted them and all had come to nothing (v. 5). Because of this danger he had written this Epistle, was always praying for them and desired to visit them again. In his prayers, he asked that their love should grow more and more, because love is the evidence of the reality and vigour of our faith. However, love is not the only end in view and is not an end in itself. He asks that, through love, their hearts might be established in holiness, and such holiness as shall be acceptable before the Father at the coming of the Lord.

Thus the hope of the Lord's coming is the reason why we should be different from the world and deaf to its temptations. It is very important to maintain the balance between love and holiness, because both of them form the atmosphere of heaven and are found with all perfection in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Hope of His Coming Gives Comfort in the Time of Loss.

"... that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope ... For the Lord Himself shall descend ... Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (4:13-18). The hopelessness and despair of the world is banished by faith in Christ, who is "the resurrection and the life". In 2Timothy 1:10 Paul speaks of the first coming of Christ, "who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". So, because of the death and triumphant resurrection of Christ, death has already been defeated and corruption will give place to life eternal, both spiritually and physically, in those who believe.

However, it is not just the absence of death and corruption which brings comfort to those who mourn. The wonderful positive side is that "the Lord Himself shall descend ... we which are alive and remain shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord ... so shall we ever be with the Lord". The Lord shall come down personally to meet us! For ever, we will be comforted by the One who said to disciples on that dark night before Calvary: "Let not your heart be troubled", and went to

prepare a place for us, saying, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself" (John 14:1-3).

The Hope of His Coming is the Great Incentive to Consecrate Ourselves Entirely to God.

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithfull *is* He that calleth you, who also will do it" (5:23-24). This is another of the apostle's prayers on behalf of the believers. Having spoken of the personal coming of the Lord in the future ("the Lord Himself"), now he prays for the personal intervention of God the Father ("the very God of peace", or, "the God of peace Himself" JND) in their lives in the present, in view of the second coming of the Lord.

God created every part of our being, Christ has purchased every part of our being, and the Holy Spirit wants to take possession of every part of our being. God has the right to sanctify unto Himself all that we are and all that we have. There are some, however, who, based on this passage, teach an experience of "entire sanctification" once for all, after which it is no longer possible to sin. This is wrong. The word "preserved" is enough to refute such an idea. Only God is able to preserve us blameless in our whole being. As long as we depend upon Him and fix our eyes on the coming of His Son, we shall be preserved. But, as long as we are in this world which "lieth in the wicked one", and as long as we still have our old sinful nature, we will need to pray for mercy to be faithful (1Corinthians 7:25) and depend upon God's preserving care. God is faithful, "who also will do it". The second coming of the Saviour is the great incentive for this, as the apostle John states, "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1John 3:3).

How practical is the truth of the Lord's coming! It gives us deliverance from wrath, joy in service, love for fellow-saints, comfort in sorrow and preservation in holiness. May we be enabled to experience more and more the influence of this blessed hope, in every part of our being and every aspect of our lives.

The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 5:12-28

Ian McKee

Resurgence of power (v.12-16)

In our previous paper we considered apostolic discipline in the Jerusalem assembly, resulting in the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. The evident purging of this sin from the assembly led to further progress in testimony: “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people”. While Acts 6:8; 8:6,7 & 13 shows that the demonstration of such power was not confined exclusively to apostles, in this instance it clearly was. However, we should note that sign gifts were bestowed upon a select few only in the early years following Pentecost. The exercise of such gifts of mighty power not only brought blessing to many individuals, but also produced reverential fear and awe in the general population. This would be the talk of the city.

From the middle of v.12 to the end of v.14 there is a parenthesis; that is additional related information which is often shown in brackets. This tells us that the Jerusalem believers were united and found gathered at Solomon’s colonnade, the eastern cloister of the Temple precincts, where Peter had preached his second sermon following the miraculous healing of the lame man (Acts 3.11). It seems that this was the place where all the believers used to meet together; certainly no private home, nor any other public building, would have sufficed for their increasing numbers.

This parenthesis summarises the effect of the apostolic preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit: first in relation to unbelievers. Evidences of power associated with divine chastening caused an awestruck fear. Unbelieving Jews were therefore fearful of associating with the assembly, being warned by the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. Thus the assembly was preserved from unbelievers

feigning belief in the gospel message just to receive material benefits. Pentecostal power was to be feared, it discouraged false profession or casual attitudes, “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them”.

Perhaps a practical digression is necessary here in relation to reception to assembly fellowship today. It is often noted that in the Acts of the Apostles baptism follows quickly after salvation and that those baptised believers then joined the local New Testament assembly. Some today may, wrongly, be tempted to believe that such should always be the normal procedure now. But we must remember that those early believers were facing the reality of becoming outcasts from their family, from society, etc as a result of their profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Also, that apostolic power had been demonstrated with fatal results against hypocrisy in a believer, which would be a massive disincentive to any unbeliever with ulterior motive seeking association with the assembly. Weakness in assembly testimony today may often be traced back to earlier carelessness in reception. Applicants for fellowship must be asked about how they came to faith in Christ, evidence of new birth established, teaching given on the expected responsibilities and behaviours of assembly fellowship (as well as its privileges) and appropriate examination made to ensure that there are no moral, doctrinal or any other issues that would preclude fellowship. Remember, while salvation will fit anyone for heaven, not every saved person can be received into assembly fellowship! For instance, could a new believer be received into the fellowship if financial debts incurred before conversion remained unpaid, or if the entanglements of pre-conversion immorality were not regularised according to Scripture? However, those who came into the fellowship of the Jerusalem assembly had already counted the cost of so doing. There was little risk of any unbeliever, or disobedient believer with irregularities in their history or lifestyle, seeking admission when instant death could be the outcome!

Notwithstanding the gravity of these matters, there was general recognition of the power manifested; and the believers and apostles were highly regarded by the people who “magnified them”. It is good when even those who might not want salvation for themselves, have a healthy respect for believers whose lives are consistent with the doctrines they profess. A good testimony among the unsaved is essential to gospel witness.

Second the parenthesis also shows that saving faith is absolutely essential, “And believers were the more added to the Lord”. While we have looked at the solemn side to Pentecostal power, this did not inhibit further great missionary success with many true conversions. The phrase “added to the Lord” refers to the sovereign work of God in making a believer become a member of the body of which The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head. “Multitudes both of men and women” shows that salvation and inclusion in the church that is His body is not gender specific, females and males are equally included.

The commencement of v.15 links back to the first phrase of v.12. The signs validated the men and their message resulting in people carrying out onto the main thoroughfares their sick relatives and friends to lay them on mattresses “that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them”. We do not read that their confident expectation was disappointed. Whilst it is possible that many were more occupied with the shadow of Peter than the substance of the Risen Christ, there is some understanding that there was a power in operation that was unknown in Judaism. They may have recognised that close association with purity and holiness would bring blessing. While there was no virtue in Peter’s shadow, they recognised Peter as a man of God and apostle of Jesus Christ. However imperfect their understanding, it was faith, rather than superstition, that was operating here.

In providing his description of this healing, Luke clearly distinguishes between physical conditions and demon possession. But irrespective of the condition there was apostolic power to meet whatever need. This chapter therefore demonstrates that there was a fullness of

power to heal and liberate as there was power to judge and discipline. The apostles therefore did the same work that the Lord had done in His earthly ministry. When the Jerusalem assembly was purged and cleansed it became an instrument of further gospel blessing and healing. Purity is essential to power; and divine power is essential to blessing. Too often we judge success in numerical terms, but numbers are no substitute for purity and spiritual power.

Persecution renewed (v.17-28)

The evident reality that they had healed “every one” caused frustration to the Jewish leaders and provoked the second persecution, just as the healing of the crippled man provoked the first, Acts chapters 3 and 4. Again the name of Jesus Christ, the crucifixion and resurrection, together with issues of culpability and jealousy were at the heart of their concern. While Sadducees were the primary movers here, v.34 shows that Pharisees were also involved. “Filled with indignation” indicates they were jealous lest their power and prestige be transferred by the people to the apostles. Hence their hostility stemmed from their own envy to the extent that it could not be contained; it was boiling over. All twelve apostles were therefore arrested and put in the holding cells in the public prison to be later brought before the Sanhedrin.

Divine irony is seen in v.19. Although Sadducees did not believe in angels, it was just such a heavenly messenger God sent to open the prison doors! This is the providence of God acting to confound the forces opposed to His work. The liberating angel also carries a message: “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life”. They were encouraged to be steadfast in their purpose, to be faithful in their preaching and to preach in the public place where the people are to be found. “All the words of this life” is a beautiful title for the gospel message. It is life in Christ the Risen Lord, the full message of the new, resurrection life. There is no real difference between “life” and “salvation” in this context. The gospel message is comprehensive and vital. It is the **only** message whereby souls may hear and live.

Armed with heaven's authority, at daybreak, at the time of morning sacrifice, and in contravention of the Sanhedrin's instruction (4:18), the apostles enter the temple precincts to teach from the Old Testament Scriptures. Although angels may bring a message from heaven to earth, they do not have the privilege we have to preach the gospel of the grace of God to our fellow men! While the apostles are engaged in obeying their heavenly commission in the temple, another group is gathering. This consists of the high priest and his entourage, the Sanhedrin and, unusually, the full representation of the elders (senate) are also called to give greater weight to the intended judgment through their numbers. But the gathering of these pompous men is thrown into confusion by the return of the officer of the temple guard with his report. Remember it is not so long since the Jewish leaders were confronted by the problem of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ being missing from the garden tomb! Now they are told that the twelve apostles, who have been preaching in the Name of that very same person, have gone missing from a secure and appropriately guarded prison! What humiliation! But it was more than this: these leaders were now thoroughly perplexed and worried men, almost to the point of despair. But instead of repentance, they are more concerned as to what might be the outcome if this preaching and the associated blessings are allowed to go on. They then get a further blow when someone enters the council chamber to announce, "Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people".

The apostles are then rearrested. They did not resist, but it is interesting that those sent to arrest them were careful to do this "without violence" for they were afraid of a popular uprising. It is a pity that it is man they fear, not God. The second attempt at questioning then gets underway.

Three charges are made. The **first** relates to disobedience to the earlier command that "ye should not teach in this name", but notice they could not bring themselves to mention that name! The **second**

is “behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine”, which is an admission of the court’s powerlessness before the purpose of God, a statement of truth not intended as a compliment but now eternally preserved in the Holy Scriptures. Evidently a profound effect had been produced in Jerusalem with this new teaching and life being the subject of curious consideration and daily conversation. **Third**, they feared that the apostolic preaching was causing the people to reassess their position regarding the rulers and Christ and could “bring this man’s blood upon us”. Yet they still contemptuously refer to the Saviour as “this man”, but their authority is seeping away in the face of undeniable truth. A mighty power is at work through the preaching of men, without any central organisation, administrative systems, etc. But what are such human innovations when compared with the operations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of faithful believers who are marked by personal purity, are obedient to Scripture and are fearless in their gospel witness?

THE LOCAL ASSEMBLY

J.A. Davidson

Paper 7(i) – THE PURITY

In this Paper we shall consider SEVEN forms of assembly discipline. “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself (how it is necessary to behave) in [the] house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Tim. 3:15). The church of God character of the local assembly reflects authority, discipline and purity doctrinally and morally fitting to the enjoyed presence of God.

1. A brother overtaken in a fault

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye (emphatic) which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

The expression “we be brethren” is first used in Genesis 13:8. “A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17). This suggests a realm of relationship and responsibility. The brother has been tripped up, he has made a slip, his lapse has been a definite fall. This is not the general pattern of his life but he has been caught in some known act. Perhaps he has been unwittingly deceived by false teaching. Instead of standing up, he has been tripped up. His fall is a surprise. “Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness”. This is not a work for novices. It requires the patience and perseverance of true shepherd care, with spiritual skill. “Restore” (continuous present) as a broken limb, healing the injured, adjusting the severed joint. “Ye” may suggest a number of brethren. “Restore” to the Lord, to the fellowship, bring him back to where he should be. The thought is of mending the net. Assemblies that are torn and rent do not catch fish. Under law there would not be recovery. Spiritual compassion is required in binding up broken lives and testimony. “Considering thyself, lest thou (emphatic) also be tempted”. This is not to be done in a dominant, assertive way but in meekness, knowing that we are also vulnerable.

2. Personal offence between two believers

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matt. 18:15).

The word “alone” implies personal rather than public sin. This is a case of individual and personal offence which again should be dealt with in a spirit of meekness and forgiveness. In this passage the Lord has already condemned an attitude of pride, self exaltation and thinking down upon others. Each believer is precious to God as a child is precious to a father’s heart. Even angels are used by God to

take care of His own. Previous verses speak of the Shepherd Who sought the sheep who went astray. This attitude will preserve us from taking offence easily. We should not approach a personal difference with a fellow believer in the spirit of vindictive self righteousness. It is better even to suffer personal wrong than to enter into conflict to the detriment of the assembly. Reclaiming love leads to an attitude of forgiveness. Concern for a wayward child or compassion for a wandering sheep is better than revengeful bitterness.

“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matt. 18:16). Aim to win back the wrongdoer. Do not punish or criticise. Prayerfully together in private, try to convince the person of his wrongdoing from the Word of God. However unrepentance and unforgiveness form a barrier with God and with our brethren. The matter must then be brought to the attention of spiritual overseers or trustworthy witnesses in the assembly.

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the Church.” The matter now becomes a case of church discipline. Petty personal differences should never reach such a situation. Serious moral or doctrinal sin must be judged by the assembly but this has began as a matter of personalities which has developed with potential to divide the assembly. Paul writes, “If then ye have judgements of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church ... Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1Cor. 6:4-5). The conscience of the very simplest believer is in keeping with the mind of God and the Word of God and is quite competent to judge. “Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather *suffer yourselves* to be defrauded?” (1Cor. 6:7). The sin of the man who has done wrong is increased by the fact that they are “brethren”. The fault, defeat, or loss increased by a desire for litigation is a damage to the assembly.

“But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an

heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye (plural) shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:17-18). (The participle perfect, “shall have been and is being bound/loosed” implies an action in the past with present results.) The action in heaven precedes that on earth. There is perfect correspondence and agreement between the action on earth and the witness that has already taken place in heaven. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” (1Cor. 6:2). Future responsibility should denote that they are competent to judge now on mere earthly things arising from common daily issues. The assembly can arbitrate scripturally between plaintiff and defendant to settle the dispute without recourse to any earthly court.

Should any variance arise between brethren or sisters, the Lord and the assembly are the final court of appeal. “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). Thus Paul urges a lowly mind subject to the Lord. He is not telling one to change her mind or rebuking the other but each to have the same attitude before the Lord. “In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better (not with vanity, self promotion) than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”. “Every one of us shall give account of himself to God”. I should treat my brother or sister as one, “for whom Christ died” (Rom. 14:10,12,15). The purity and unity of the assembly will be preserved if we each remember that the Lord died for us and forgave us. A persistent, arrogant intolerant refusal to show any love, humility, forgiveness or repentance would indicate that the man needs to hear the Gospel to lead him to repentance.

“If he neglect to hear the church” (Matt. 18:17). Note that this prolonged, wilful neglect to hear is repeated three times, relating to the humble brother, the witnesses and the church. Church discipline must then be exercised. He must be treated as an unsaved, “heathen man (Gentile) and a publican (tax collector)” because his salvation is suspect. (To be continued)

MISINTERPRETED TEXTS

1Corinthians 9:22 – “I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some”

In common usage today, the expression ‘all things to all men’ is often applied in a derogatory sense to an unprincipled or spineless individual, whose word is inconsistent and unreliable; one who is ‘two-faced,’ or changeable as the chameleon which adapts its colour according to its present surroundings. Otherwise it might be used to describe some unscrupulous and self-interested salesman, who craftily revamps his persuasive sales talk to appeal to his changing – and unsuspecting audience.

In seeking to understand any verse of scripture, above all else, it must be interpreted according to its context. The old adage is true, ‘A Text isolated from its Context becomes a Pretext.’ In stark contrast to these derogatory uses of ‘all things to all men,’ we learn from the context of 1Corinthians 9 something of the high moral, or rather, spiritual principle which governed the conduct and motivation of Paul as a sincere, selfless and trustworthy apostle and minister of the gospel. The descriptions above might well be applied to those at Corinth who sought to undermine Paul’s apostleship, of whom he writes in 2Corinthians 11 – “Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” – men motivated by self-interest, much to the detriment of the people of God. Paul’s motivating principle was ‘SELF-DENIAL FOR THE BLESSING OF OTHERS’ – of which our blessed Lord Himself is the supreme Example (Phil. 2).

1Corinthians 9:1-18 – In these verses Paul lists many privileges and liberties that were his by divine right as an apostle, as one divinely called to devote himself fully to the work of God and the gospel. His

calling included the right to forbear working, and to live of the gospel, for which similar provision was made in the Law, exemplified in those who served in the temple, and as was later ordained by the Lord Himself. Such liberties were availed of by other apostles, and even claimed by the false apostles. Paul says in v12, “Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ” and in v15, “But I have used none of these things...” We read in 1Thess. 2:9 and 2Thess. 3:8, of his labours night and day to supply his own needs. For him it was sufficient reward that he might make the gospel without charge to others; none could ever accuse him of abusing his authority in this regard.

1Corinthians 9:19-23 – Here the apostle manifests the same spirit of self-denial in forgoing his personal liberties for the gospel’s sake, making himself a ‘bondservant (one with no rights) unto all, that he might gain the more’ for Christ. To the Jews, to whom certain meats were forbidden as unclean, Paul, knowing that in Christ and under grace, all such distinctions were done away, became **as** a Jew, refraining from eating anything that could be an obstacle to the salvation of the Jews. Likewise to the Gentiles, those without law, he would avoid anything of Jewish law or custom that might prove a hindrance to winning them for Christ. Notice that in all things he acted in the fear of God, and under law to Christ.

In dealing with the weak, perhaps those from whatever background, who might have scruples e.g. with regard to eating meat of any kind, but eating herbs, Paul again was willing to refrain from any action of his that might prove a barrier to the salvation of any. It is important to observe that such consideration on the part of Paul never involved compromise with anything sinful, of conflict with any scriptural principle, but related only to matters of no moral consequence, such as Jewish customs or individual personal scruples. And so in v22 he draws to a close by saying:

“I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some”

In conclusion – to sum up the meaning of the text, and its lessons for us today:

1. Paul, in “becoming all things to all men” never presumed to take licence, or liberties beyond that which was legitimate and scriptural – whether in his conduct, his message, his methods, or his associations in the spread of the gospel. All was done in the fear of God, and subject to Christ.
2. On the contrary, as the context in 1Corinthians 9 fully confirms, Paul was prepared, as he considered appropriate, to deny himself the use of those privileges and liberties that were rightfully his, forgoing his own rights for the sake of the gospel, and of others – Jew or Gentile – that he might gain the more.
3. While the chapter considered is concerned with the gospel and the salvation of the lost, the same principle underlies Paul’s teaching in Romans 14 and in 1Corinthians 8, where the context is of harmony between brethren of different traditions and sensitivities, and consideration for the conscience and spiritual well-being of fellow believers.

God Give us Men

Written by the late Mr A.W. Joyce

In 1Corinthians 16:13, the Apostle Paul by the Spirit wrote, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” *God needs men*, He is looking for them, and He is ready to use them. Before the battle between God’s people and the Syrians, Joab addressed his brother who was his lieutenant, and the people of Israel, in these stirring words, “Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly (A.V. *play the men*) for our people, and for the cities of our God” (2Sam. 10:12).

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel saying... "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezek. 22:30). God is looking for men, but evidently at times they are hard to find. Surely we are in need of men to-day, men of God who are willing to serve, willing to labour, willing to suffer.

God needs *men in the harvest field* to go out from the beaten track with the Gospel of His grace to win souls to the Saviour in the "regions beyond". Recently a servant of Christ who is pioneering in a new field wrote, "I am alone here, I have tried again and again to get some young preacher to help me, but evidently many prefer the easier path of preaching among the assemblies. Elders often make this easier for such by ministering the assembly funds to those who make the rounds of the assemblies, while the labourer in the new fields is neglected." As James said, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10). When one young preacher was asked why he did not go into new fields, he replied, "It takes money to do this." Well might we say "God needs men". Men who are willing to trust the living God and not the assemblies, who will look to the source and not to the channel, who are willing to work, to gather their own audiences, pitch their own tent, or hire some building and get to the work. Preach in the open air, preach from door to door, and prove what God will yet do with, and for, those who are men who will humbly and faithfully serve Him in the Gospel. Will God fail those whom He has sent? Verily no, though He may see fit to try and test them. Mr. Donald Ross was a man after this order. When crossing from Scotland to America someone asked him why he was coming to the new country. His reply was "To try and knock the bottom out of the promises of God." This was no vain boast as this honoured servant of Christ went on pioneering to the end of his long life.

God needs *men in the assemblies*. Men who will be exercised about encouraging those who are adventuring themselves in the forefront of the battle. Men who will not be afraid to discourage the tendency of preachers whose efforts are confined to preaching the Gospel in

the assemblies. But above all God needs men among His people who are ready to stand for the truth of God, and to steadfastly resist the current of evil, and the departure from assembly principles. Men who will refuse to allow unscriptural innovations to be introduced into the churches of God. Where the wall of separation has been breaking down may our God not have to seek in vain as in Ezekiel's day, "for a man ... that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me."

May the Lord grant us to have the stability of men in the things of God, "That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, *even Christ*" (Eph. 4:14-15).

God give us Men!
Days such as ours demand,
Warriors in every land,
Men with hearts true to God,
Men with feet clean and shod,
Having the dew of youth,
Loins girt about with truth,
Breastplate of righteousness,
Helmet of saving grace,
Bearing faith's mighty shield,
The Spirit's sword to wield,
Such men we need.

God give us men!
Our souls upon Thee wait,
Shepherd chief, good and great,
Thy throne we supplicate,
God give us men!

The Inspiration of Scripture

Phillip Harding

What is Inspiration?

The answer to this question is clear in the Scriptures. It is the power of the Spirit of God in the writers of the Bible imparting to them the divine message, and enabling them to express accurately that message in their writings, for “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2Pet. 1:21). The Holy Spirit controlled the writers of the Bible so that it is absolutely accurate, authoritative, and trustworthy. Thus the Holy Scriptures are living.

However, while the writers were moved by the Spirit they remained thinking, willing, and self-conscious, resulting in their particular mannerisms and styles being clearly seen in their writings. The divine influence is primary and the human secondary. Thus what they wrote cannot be looked upon as their own product but as the pure Word of God.

The Claim to Inspiration

The claims of the Bible to be the inspired word of God are absolute – “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2Tim. 3:16) – the Bible is vibrant with the breath of God speaking to all who will hear and obey. The writers themselves claim inspiration for their writings or for the writings of another – e.g. “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD” (Ex. 24:4); “The word of the LORD came...” (Jer. 1:4; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zeph. 1:1; Haggai 1:1; Zech. 1:1); “The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel” (Ezek. 1:3); “the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas” (Acts 1:16). Peter, by linking the epistles of Paul with other Scriptures, claimed for them divine inspiration (2Pet. 3:15,16).

The claim of verbal inspiration is unequivocal – e.g. “Write... words” (Ex. 34:27; Jer. 30:2); “I have put My words in thy mouth” (Isa. 51:16;

59:21; Jer. 1:9); “thou shalt speak My words unto them” (Ezek. 2:7; 3:4); “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (1Cor. 2:13); “And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:5). The Lord Jesus Christ again and again testified to the inspiration of the Scriptures referring to them as the word of God (Mk. 7:13; Lk. 4:4; Jn. 10:35), claiming for them absolute authority and unerring accuracy – e.g. “David himself said by the Holy Ghost” (Mk. 12:36); “the scriptures must be fulfilled” (Mk. 14:49); “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail” (Lk. 16:17); “all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me” (Lk. 24:44); “the scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35). The Lord rebukes the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and corrects the error of the Sadducees by the use of the Scriptures (Matt. 15:3-9; 22:29-32). Christ and the Bible stand together as the Living Word and the written Word of God.

The Proof of Inspiration

Internal Evidence. The New Testament gives unanswerable testimony to the divine inspiration of the Old Testament by the fulfilment of its prophecies – e.g. “thus it is written by the prophet” (Matt. 2:5); “that the scripture might be fulfilled” (Jn. 19:24,28,36-37). The prophecies concerning the Messiah in themselves reveal the accuracy of the Scriptures as to the circumstances and place of His birth (Isa. 7:14 cf. Matt. 1:22-23; Micah 5:2 cf. Matt. 2:5-6); the nature of His ministry and rejection by the nation (Isa. 42:1-4 cf. Matt. 12:17-20; Isa. 61:1,2 cf. Lk. 4:18-19; Jn. 1:10-11); His betrayal and death by crucifixion (Ps. 41:9 cf. Jn. 13:18; Ps. 22:1,16 cf. Matt. 27:35,46); His burial and resurrection (Isa. 53:9 cf. Matt. 27:57-60; Ps. 16:10 cf. Acts 13:34-37) – all were foretold in terms that cannot be disputed and all were fulfilled perfectly.

The prophecies of the Bible are infallible and each one has or will be fulfilled as predicted. The verbal inspiration of the Bible is also established by stress being placed on a tense or word used – e.g. the

writer of Hebrews 12:27 establishes the fact of future judgment by quoting the words, “yet once more” from Haggai 2:6; the Lord Jesus proves the truth of resurrection by reminding the Sadducees of the tense God used when speaking to Moses: “I am (not was) the God of Abraham...” (Ex. 3:6; Matt. 22:32); in Galatians 3:16 the Apostle Paul proves that justification is by faith in Christ alone, apart from the law, by drawing attention to a singular word (seed not seeds – Gen. 13:14-15; 17:8). Here then is clear proof that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, and that men should take heed to its teachings.

Its History. About forty persons from different walks of life and over a period of at least 1,600 years were used in the writing of the Bible. The book of Job is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, of books in existence today but even the last book of the Bible to be written is almost 2,000 years old. At one time scholarly men (so called) ridiculed the claim that writing was in existence in the day of Moses, but archaeological discovery has proved that writing was present even earlier, the fact of which is indicated in Job 19:23. Since the Bible is an ancient book there is ample evidence for its genuineness. Most of the classical writings of men are readily accepted on the grounds of a few existing manuscripts yet there are in existence over 3,000 manuscripts of the New Testament alone apart from the many quotations found in the writings of Christian leaders from AD 100 onwards. Internal evidence abounds as to times and countries, rulers and offices, places and persons, circumstances and conditions – all of which prove the accuracy of the Bible.

Over and over the critic has been silenced regarding such by further archaeological discoveries. Down through the centuries the enemies of the Bible have sought to destroy it, infidels have scoffed at it, and critics have sought to undermine it yet the Bible remains as ever for it is “the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1Pet. 1:23). No book has been translated into so many languages and dialects, for it is the Word of God to all nations. Its message is for all men, at all times, whatever their background, nationality, language, culture or standing (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 2:10). However ancient, the

Bible has a voice for us today – its divine teachings as to moral and spiritual conditions are timeless and we do well to take heed of them.

Its Harmony. Although the Bible consists of 66 books written by some 40 different persons over approximately 1,600 years, there is a wonderful oneness, and so it is referred to as the volume of the Book (Ps. 40:7; Heb. 10:7) and the Scripture (Dan. 10:21; Jn. 10:35; 2Pet. 1:20). It is also called the Scriptures (Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:24; Acts 17:2,11) for each part has the same characteristic as the whole and has its unique message. Each part is essential to the whole Bible and each part corresponds with the rest, unfolding the ways and will of God. The orderly progress of doctrine is clear evidence of God, in His own time, unfolding the wonderful story of redemption. It is so profound that its teachings cannot be exhausted (Job 11:7; Rom. 11:33), and yet its message is so simple that a child can understand and accept it (Mk. 10:14-15). Such is its structure that its message is an enigma and foolishness to the wise of this world, because it cannot be grasped by human intellect (1Cor. 2:14), yet it is revealed to “childlike faith” (Matt. 11:25-26; 1Cor. 1:18-21). There is diversity within its pages as to style and literature (allegory, law, lyric, parable, poetry, prose etc.) but all contribute to one harmonious volume with one theme running throughout its pages. This wonderful harmony can never be explained apart from the fact that there was one mind behind the writing of the Bible. This in itself proves its divine inspiration.

Its Contents. There is one main theme in the Bible – Christ and the work of redemption. This theme is developed progressively and so the whole Bible is necessary to understand fully the greatness of Christ and His redemptive work. The Old Testament Scriptures tell how God created man; how man rebelled against Him, falling into sin; of God’s promise to him; how God took one man (Abraham) and one nation (Israel); of the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt; of the giving of the law; of Israel’s journeyings through the wilderness to the promised land; of their history from their entrance into the land until their captivity; of the many prophecies concerning

the promised Messiah and His coming Kingdom. Throughout these Scriptures many pictures and illustrations, besides the prophecies, are given of the coming of Christ, of His redemptive work and of His glories. In the Gospels, what were but pictures and illustrations concerning the Messiah become facts, and prophecies are fulfilled, all proving the Lord Jesus Christ to be the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Saviour who gave His life a ransom for all (1Tim. 2:5-6) and who rose triumphant from the dead. The rest of the New Testament tells of the spread of the Gospel message and of the doctrine of Christ and His redemptive work. The last book of the Bible unfolds the end results of the wonderful redemptive work of Christ for those who believe and the eternal doom for those who despise that work by rejecting Christ. Thus one harmonious theme can be traced through the whole of the Bible, unfolding the fall of man and God's great provision for him in the Person and work of His Son (Jn. 3:16).

Its Transparency. No attempt is made to avoid the truth in its pages however unpalatable it may be. Unlike human productions which so often assume, suggest and suppose, the Bible asserts, states and speaks with authority. It does not entertain the reasoning, opinions or theories of men but demands from men unqualified acceptance of its statements and unhesitating obedience to its commands. It plainly states the origin of sin (Rom. 5:12), the deceitfulness of man's heart (Jer. 17:9), the ruin and guilt of humanity (Rom. 3:19; 22-23), and the inability of man to fit himself for heaven (Rom. 5:6). It not only reveals the wickedness of the ungodly but also unfolds the sin and failure of the chosen people and servants of God. It never covers over the true facts or seeks to flatter any, which is a clear proof that it is not the product of mere men. It shines uncompromisingly into hearts and consciences exposing sins of every kind and bringing about conviction by the truth it states. It not only brings conviction and the blessing of salvation to all who accept its truth, it also produces holiness in the lives of all who receive and practise its teaching.

It is a Holy Book and sinful men hate, ridicule and reject it because it condemns their way and manner of life. The plain and accurate

statements of the Bible on true scientific matters (not speculative science), long before the comparatively recent discoveries of scientists, prove its divine inspiration – e.g. light apart from the sun (Gen. 1:3); the significance of blood to physical life (Lev. 17:11); the earth being in space (Job 26:7); the cycle relative to rain (Job 36:27-29); the motion of light (Job 38:19 – the way not the place); the global shape of the earth (Prov. 8:27; Isa. 40:22); the wind circuits of the world (Eccl. 1:6).

“PAUL’S METAPHORS”

J.A. Davidson

(9) ASTRONOMY : THE GLORY OF THE CELESTIAL

We are first introduced to Paul, when as Saul of Tarsus he was arrested on the road to Damascus: “Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven” (Acts 9:3). In his missionary travels he had experiences; “When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared” (Acts 27:20). In Paul’s epistles he used terrestrial and celestial metaphors.

NIGHT AND DAY – “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep... The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the amour of light” (Rom. 13:11-12). In view of the Lord’s coming we must discard the night clothes of moral darkness and put on the protective armour of light. These nocturnal metaphors are instructive. Noah slept and his son was cursed. Samson slept and he lost his strength. Abner slept and the king was in danger. Jonah slept and his companions were perishing. The virgins slept and the other virgins were left outside. Peter, James and John slept on the mountain of glory and in the garden of gloom.

LIGHTS IN THE WORLD – “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (generation), among whom ye shine as lights (luminaries) in the world; Holding forth the word of life” (Phil. 2:15-16). Here Paul considers the children of God in character as luminaries radiating light and hence dispelling the moral and spiritual darkness around them. We live among an unscrupulous, dishonest, perverted and depraved generation of people. What we are in practice (v15) comes before what we preach in the Gospel (v16).

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness” (1Thess. 5:5). We are not ignorant of the times and seasons. We are not left to wander and stumble in the dark as not knowing God’s purposes and about the Lord’s return. We have light indwelling, illumination for the path and should walk in the realm of day. “For ye were sometimes (once) darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8). “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11).

The stars appearing in their sparkling brilliance in the Eastern sky, and giving light upon the earth, are a figure of the Christian seen as shining in a dark world seeking to be a testimony for God.

CELESTIAL BODIES – “*There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead*” (1Cor. 15:40-42). In dealing with the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, the apostle illustrates the difference between the present and the future body by an allusion to the “Celestial bodies”. Amongst these there is an identity of substances and purpose combined with variety of form and of glory. The sun, the moon, and the stars, though they all give light, differ greatly from each other in size and brilliance. Yet each is suited to its own sphere, and its own function. So it will be with the resurrected bodies of the saints.

Paul as he journeyed by night, looked up with worship in his heart and thought of the nocturnal sky, the immense galaxies of the power of an all wise Creator. The scientific examinations by the microscope and the exploration of space by the telescope prove (contrary to the unscientific lies of evolution) the separation of the species terrestrial (v39) and the varied glories of the bodies celestial (v41). “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man (Adam, frail, feeble, dust), that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him” (Psa. 8:3-4). Paul writes: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor. 4:6).

The Servant of God

N. John Jeyanandam

“But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12)

Let us try to list a few vital aspects that should characterize the life of a servant of God. These are essential and basic rudiments for a servant. They are the threads with which a messenger should weave his character and his life.

“Preachers are not sermon makers, but men makers and saint makers, and he is only well-trained for this business who has made himself a man and a saint. God needs men great in holiness, great in faith, great in love, great in fidelity, always preaching holy sermons in the pulpit, and proving by holy lives out of it. These can mould a generation for God.” - E.M Bounds

The Call of God

The realization of the call of God in a person's life may come down like thunder, as in the life of Saul (Acts 9) or it may go down gradually and softly, as in the life of young Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). However, when that call comes, there is a hidden supernatural dealing. It is the Divine Hand moving and moulding him. "I have chosen you", said the Lord (John 15:16). We are not called to preach the gospel because we are saved or sanctified – the call is infinitely different.

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1Cor. 1:17). Here Paul asserts that the call of God is to preach the gospel and nothing else. The passion of Paul's life was to proclaim the gospel of Christ. He welcomed heartbreak, disillusionment and tribulation for that reason. Despite adversities he was steadfast in his devotion to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every one of us that is saved is *called of God to testify* to the fact of his own salvation, "For necessity is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (1Cor. 9:16). Paul is here referring to the constraining pang of pain he experienced by the compelling force of the call to preach the gospel. Being made a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is not *seeking* permission from us as to what he should do or where he should go. God makes us as 'broken bread' and 'poured out wine' to please Himself (Eph. 5:2). To be "separated to the gospel" means being able to hear the call of God (Rom. 1:1). It means God has the right man who truly cares about His gospel and faithfully proclaims it. Are you in God's grip? Is this the one and only purpose for you – God's purpose?

Holding the Light – A Shining Light

A Christian servant is one who perpetually *looks* into the face of God and then goes forth to *talk* to others. We must build our faith not on *fading lights*, but on the *Light that never fails*. Our ministry to God is characterized by an abiding glory of which the servant is totally unaware. Moses wist not (did not know) that the skin of his face shone, because he had been talking with God (Exod. 34:29). We are

never called to display our doubts and difficulties openly or to express the hidden Joys and delights of our life with God. The secret of the servant's life is that *he stays in tune with God all the time*.

Holding the Key – The Gospel

The key to gospel work is the *authority of the Lord Jesus Christ*, not the needs of the lost souls. Christians must look to the Lord, and seek His help, as they prepare themselves and try to serve Him. Our Lord is the supreme Lord over His servants and shows Himself as the absolute sovereign God. Our Lord in His commission says, 'Go, therefore, on the basis of the revealed truth of My sovereignty – all power belongs to Me – teaching and preaching out of your living experience of Me'. I must know the Lord myself, I must rely on the "all power" in whose Name I "Go, therefore ...". To "go" simply means to *live* and *move* in Him. He takes upon Himself the act of sending us.

The core theme of the preacher's message is the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only Redeemer of lost sinners. The Christian worker is one who is immersed in the truth of that revelation. His message is not nationalistic, favouring nations, tribes, languages or individuals, but it is "for the whole world". The gospel worker is one who is *bound to his Master* as well as to the stated *mission* and purpose of his Lord.

Servants are not called simply to convey their testimonies and experiences, but to proclaim the gospel of Christ. It is not just doing this or that, which is considered to be Christian service, but the will of God for him. Christian entertainment is not his business.

The Christian worker has to be a sacred "go-between" between His Master and those to whom he is sent. He must closely identify with his Lord and the reality of His redeeming work. His life has to be re-filled by His Lord and His message.

Holding on to the Grace of God

A servant of God, must stand so much alone that he never realizes it.

We must get used to being alone with God. The apostle Paul said, “No man stood with me, but all men forsook me ... the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2Tim. 4:16,17). When important individuals are called away, we are sad. When those on whom we trusted leave us, we are disappointed. We may come to a stage, where we are able to see that they are meant to go, so that only one thing is left for us to do – to look into the face of God for ourselves. *One man with God is a majority.*

“As workers together with Him ... ye received not the grace of God in vain” (2Cor. 6:1). “My grace is sufficient” (2Cor. 12:9).

The grace we enjoyed yesterday will not be sufficient for today’s need. Grace is the unmerited and overflowing favour of God and we can always count on it being available to draw upon whenever needed. “Approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses” (2Cor. 6:4), that is where our patience is tested. Have we failed to rely on God here and at this point? Or are we saying to ourselves, ‘Well, I won’t count this time?’ We are to take hold of the grace of God *now*. Draw on His grace now – today.

God’s Hold on His Servant

“But I follow after (I press on), if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).

One should never choose by himself to be a worker for God, unless God calls him. The one who has heard the call of God must be careful to *heed* His call and not to turn aside to the right or to the left (Deut. 5:32). We are here to work for God not because we have chosen to do so, but because God has “laid hold of us”. And once He does so, we are to keep steadfastly *committed* to God. “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). When the call comes to preach, there must be that compelling grip of God’s hand on us. *Our life is in the grip of God’s hands*, “But the hand of the LORD was strong upon me” (Ezek. 3:14, see also 3:22, 8:1, 33:22 and 37:1). We can never remove the hand of

the Lord when once it is placed upon us, “I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, *I press (forward)* toward the mark for the prize of the *high calling of God* in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13,14).

Holding the Responsibility

As servants of God, and as His messengers we must be fully aware of the solemnity of our responsibility. We must be conscious of its complexity, and the multifarious nature of the work.

Arthur W. Pink aptly states, ‘The work unto which the servant of Christ is called is many sided. Not only is he to preach the gospel to the unsaved, to feed God’s people with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15), and to take the stumbling stone out of their way (Isa. 57:14), but he is also charged to cry aloud, “Spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression” (Isa. 58:1 and compare 1Tim. 4:2), while another important part of His commission is stated in, “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God” (Isa. 40:1).’

Being an Example

“Preach the Word” (2Tim. 4:2).

There is a difference between sharing a testimony and preaching the word. A preacher is one who has received the call of God and is determined to use all his energy to proclaim God’s word. God takes us beyond our own aspirations and ideas for our lives, and moulds and shapes us for His purpose. Let us allow God to have complete liberty in our lives as we speak. Before God’s message can liberate other people, His liberation must first be felt in our own lives, even before it is preached out. Gather your materials carefully, and then allow God to “set your words on fire” for His glory and for His Name’s sake.

Being Ready in Season

“Be instant (ready) in season, out of season” (2Tim. 4:2).

Most of us suffer with the unbalanced tendency of being ready only at “in season”. Elijah had to do nothing for three and a half years than to hide himself, before he could present himself to the king (1Kings Chapters 17 and 18). After having received God’s call, Paul went to Arabia for about three years, and there he was at the Lord’s feet, before he met the apostle Peter at Jerusalem (Gal. 1:16-20). When God is guiding or leading, sometimes we are not ready. When there is desire in an individual towards the things of the Lord, when he needs the help most, we are utterly unready. They are out of season for us. There are some people who are totally undeployable in the spiritual realm and in spiritual service. They are spiritually feeble and weak and they refuse to do anything unless they are supernaturally inspired. The proof that our relationship is right with God is that we do our best whether we feel inspired or not and on *all* occasions.

One of the worst traps a Christian worker can fall into is to become obsessed with this own exceptional moments of inspiration. Are you ready when the Spirit of God gives you a time of inspiration and insight? If you could make a good service out of your best moments only, then you will find that God will fade out of your life. Be obedient in your work to God as He has placed Himself nearest to you, as well as when you feel His is not. Stretch out your hand and reach out to Him.

Being Faithful and Bold

“Thou shalt speak My words unto them, whether they will hear, of whether they will forbear” (Ezek. 2:7).

Ezekiel was called of God to be a *prophet*, not to be a *salesman*. He was to be *faithful* not to be *successful*. He was told not to take a survey or to give to His people a message which would be liked or appreciated by them. He was to simply *convey* what God had to say, no matter how people would react to it.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to

themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2Tim. 4:3-4).

Preachers, who aim to attract people, very often “succeed”. No matter how many do that, God’s true messengers must “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2Tim. 4:2). Faithful preachers would follow this scriptural dictum, whether they become popular or not, whether they are heard or rejected.

What made prophet Ezekiel faithful? He had a *glimpse* of God’s glory (Ezek. 1:1-21), so he cared more for what God had told him rather than what people said. He was *filled* with God’s Word and found it tasty and nourishing (Ezek. 3:1-6), so he knew by experience that only the word that comes from God, could bring life and happiness to the simple and empty souls. Ezekiel’s resolve was *hardened* by God (Ezek. 3:8-9), that he was always ready for turbulent and troublesome times. Moreover, God made him to be a *sign* for His people (Ezek. 12:6).

Awed by God’s majesty, filled with God’s Spirit, nourished by God’s word, toughened for God’s work, one is to be *faithful* and bring God’s Word to the people, whether they would take it or reject it.

Being a Faithful Steward

Many servants have fallen, being unfaithful and having been side-tracked by mismanaging money matters. Money is necessary and essential for survival. A Christian should always have a contented mind (1Tim. 6:6-10). His prayer should be, “Give us this day our daily bread”, and the daily bread is inclusive of all things for our well-being. Greed for money is sin and it affects God’s service. One cannot serve God and mammon. Two striking incidents in the Bible help us to understand the ill effects of going after money. One is Gehazi, the servant of Elisha (2Kings 5:20-27) and the other is Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24).

We possess, but God owns; God enables us to earn and so our earnings are God's. Thus we have to be careful both in our earning and in our spending. John Wesley said "Make all you can; save all you can and give all you can". If we consider ourselves as owners rather than managers or as stewards, we will continue to be owned by our possessions.

"Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all. In Thine hand is power and might; in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all" (1Chron. 29:11,12).

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Psalm 2

Cliff Jones

The basic teaching of the Holy Spirit in Psalm 2 is that those who defy God will perish, and those who submit to Him will be blessed. Psalm 2 is a Messianic Psalm, it tells us something of the Person and work of the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is sometimes said that to be a Messianic Psalm, a Psalm must speak of the Lord Jesus Christ, be quoted in the New Testament and be applied to Him. There are however, three exceptions to this general rule, and they are Psalms 24, 72 and 89, which are Messianic Psalms but are not quoted in the New Testament and there applied to the Lord. Psalm 2 was written by David (Acts 4:25,26) and is quoted in the New

Testament (Acts 4:25-28; 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15), and each quotation refers to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many believe that Psalms 1 and 2 were originally, one Psalm. In Psalm 1 the blessed, righteous man is compared and contrasted with the ungodly, sinful man. In Psalm 2 the folly of the disobedient world is seen, as is the inevitable exaltation and triumph of the righteous Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 1 tells us that unstable, ungodly people will be driven away like chaff and in Psalm 2 they are seen as being broken in pieces like pottery. In Psalm 1 the righteous man is likened to a stable tree, planted by rivers of water, being watered and nourished, flourishing and bearing fruit. Psalm 1 begins by describing the blessed man and ends by warning the ungodly of their eternal doom. Psalm 2 begins with ungodly, rebellious men plotting against the Messiah, and ends by saying that those who put their trust in Him are blessed.

Rebellion (verses 1-3).

Psalm 2 is prophetic, it deals with events which are still in the future, but which are already casting their shadows before them. Turmoil, chaos and terrible events lie ahead for the world. World leaders strive, talk, scheme, plot and plan, and finally they will gather together in open rebellion against God and against His only begotten, beloved, eternal and co-equal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 1-3). Inevitably the will of the omnipotent, sovereign, eternal God will be done.

Sin “is the transgression of the law” (1Jn. 3:4), it is lawlessness, and verses 1-3 describe some of the consequences of the effects of sin in this world. Men who have not been saved by grace (Eph. 2:8), through faith in the Person and completed work on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, are enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). Their minds are hostile to God and are “not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). In the first three verses of Psalm 2 we read of men raging and plotting together to throw off, and live free from, all the restraints imposed by the laws of the God they hate. At the

present time we see such a movement starting. All over the world people of all ages, want freedom from controls and restraints on behaviour so that they may be free to “do their own thing”, reminding us of the time in Judges 17:6, when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”.

Ungodly men use their minds to think and plan evil things. We read in verse 1 that “the people imagine a vain thing”. The word translated “imagine” in this verse is translated “meditate” in Psalm 1:2. The godly man meditates day and night on the written Word of God, obeys that Word and prospers spiritually (Ps. 1:2,3; 1Pet. 2:2). In Psalm 2 we read of the ungodly using their minds to try to devise means to successfully rebel against God. We are responsible for the use we make of our minds and believers are enjoined in Romans 12:2, “be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”.

The first three verses take us to the time at the end of the Great Tribulation when kings, rulers and people will unite to attempt to prevent the Lord Jesus Christ, from ruling over the world. Having a common aim will sometimes motivate people to unite who were formally antagonistic to each other. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, barriers to cooperation were set aside, and Jew, Gentile, Herod and Pilate united in an attempt to destroy the Lord (Acts 4:26,27). When He was crucified His opposers thought that they had succeeded, but the truth is that all their anger, wrath, malice, plotting and scheming only served to achieve the fulfilment of God’s will (Acts 2:23), and His plan of salvation which was made before the foundation of the world (1Pet. 1:20). In the future, rebellious, sinful men will unite again, they will “set themselves” and “take counsel together”, against God and His Son (Ps. 2:2,3).

God the Father speaks (verses 4-6).

God is omnipotent, He is sovereign and controls all things. The almighty God “ruleth in the kingdom of men” (Dan. 4:17). The word translated “Lord” in verse 4 is *Adonai*, which means sovereign Lord,

master, ruler, owner, the One who must be obeyed. He is all-powerful and it is ludicrous and irrational for weak, puny men to rebel against Him. It is so sad and pathetic for frail mortal men to set themselves up in opposition to God, and God laughs the laugh of derision (v4). God's laughter is caused by the foolishness and pride of those who oppose His infinite power and seek to prevent His purposes being carried out. "God is love" (1Jn. 4:8), and He loves those who rebel against Him and make plans to oppose Him. Such is the love of God that "He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). Inevitably God's holy wrath will be poured out on those who rebel against Him and oppose Him (v5). At the battle of Armageddon the Lord will defeat all the enemies of God.

In verse 6 we read of God saying, "yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion". The omnipotent God speaks in the past tense, He speaks as if that which He intends to do has already been done. All God's plans and purposes will be accomplished. He will establish the Lord Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords (1Tim. 6:15) in Zion, that is Jerusalem where, throughout the Millennium, He will reign over the world righteously and with perfect justice. Then this violent world will experience and enjoy the peace, stability, happiness and prosperity for which, at this present time, so many frightened and apprehensive people are longing.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah speaks (verses 7-9).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten, eternal, co-equal and beloved Son of God. In eternity past God declared the Lord's eternal Sonship when He said to Him, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (v7). These words are quoted in Acts 13:33,34, in connection with His incarnation and resurrection, in Hebrews 1:5, referring there to His superiority over angels, and in Hebrews 5:5, in connection with His perpetual priesthood. He was referred to as "Son" when He was born (Luke 1:35); when He was baptized (Luke 3:22); and when He was transfigured (Luke 9:35).

The time will come when God the Father will give all people and the entire earth to His beloved Son (v8). These are the very things the Lord refused when Satan offered them to Him (Matt. 4:8-10). During the Millennium, the Lord Jesus Christ will rule, and His rule will be absolute, complete, just and righteous. No opposition will be tolerated; He will exercise complete and perfect control over every aspect of this world. He will rule “with a rod of iron” (v9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

The Holy Spirit speaks (verses 10-12).

We read in the Word of God that, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). In verses 10-12 of Psalm 2 the grace of God is revealed when the Holy Spirit graciously exhorts the kings and rulers of the earth to be wise and serve the Lord with reverence and godly fear, (vv 10,11) “For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Kings and rulers are told to “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry” (v12). This is the kiss of homage and subjection (1Sam. 10:1), unlike Judas’ kiss of betrayal (Luke 22:48).

At the present time, sinners, rebellious men are being graciously offered peace with God through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who have been saved by grace know that “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The Lord “made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20), for “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1Jn. 1:7). Sinners can be saved through faith in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His completed work on the cross where He suffered, bled and died paying the penalty for the sins of the whole world (Jn. 1:29; 1Jn. 2:2). Believers are saved from coming wrath through His shed blood (Rom. 5:9; Heb. 9:22).

The Holy Spirit works to convict men of sin, righteousness and judgement (Jn. 16:8-11), for God does not want people to be separated from Him eternally, suffering for their sins (Ezek. 33:11).

There is an urgency in the Spirit's words in verse 10, He says "Be wise now...". There is always urgency in connection with the offer of salvation. We are not promised tomorrow, and the Word of God warns us in Proverbs 27:1, where we read "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth", and in 2Corinthians 6:2, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." The Day of Grace could end at any second when the Lord returns to take those who have been saved to be with Himself for ever (1Thess. 4:16,17).

Men search for happiness, spending time, money and energy in the search. It is possible to find limited happiness for a time in enjoying, "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25), but, sooner or later, sin results in unhappiness. Happiness cannot be found when it is sought after as an end in itself. Holiness, righteousness, peace and happiness go together, both in this life and eternally. Happiness is a result of knowing and obeying God, and "happy is that people, whose God is the LORD" (Ps. 144:15). The man who is saved and trusts in God is a blessed and happy man, (Ps. 34:8; 40:4; 84:12). In Psalm 32:1,2, we read, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity". In Psalm 1:1,2, we learn that the blessed and happy man is the man who leads a life which is separated from the world and to God. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the only entirely and truly righteous, holy, sinless man who ever walked on this earth. He lived His life in complete obedience to His Father (Phil. 2:8).

The Lord Jesus Christ was the truly blessed and happy man of Psalm 1:1,2, but He became the forsaken man of Psalm 22:1, so that a sinful, rebellious man, like the man of Psalm 14:1, might become the blessed and happy man of Psalm 32:1,2. Those of us who have been saved can rejoice, knowing that we are blessed because our sins have been forgiven (Rom. 4:7,8), and we can praise and thank God, knowing that, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (v12).

Help for Young Believers

(3) Love for the House of God

“The House of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Tim. 3:15)

The first evidence to the reality of God’s salvation in the heart of a young believer is a love to read and obey the Word of God. This will guide the soul newly saved to seek the company of those of like minds and to develop in love for the people of God., “If a man love Me, he will keep My Words” (John 14:23). These words will guide us to where He dwells. “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). The meetings of the assembly are primarily meetings with Him. Love for Christ will be manifest in a love to be where He dwells. This is; “The House of God”. The young believer who from the Word of God, comes to this personal conviction will make the assembly his or her spiritual home and stay there for life.

David said “I have loved the habitation of Thy House, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth” (Psa. 26:8). “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the House of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD” (Psa. 27:4). In the New Testament the House of God character of the local assembly upholds the beauty of the Lord. It is the pillar of testimony to “The Mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1Tim. 3:16). No other gathering on earth is to be compared to a scripturally gathered New Testament assembly. This is the testimony of “truth” to our glorified Lord, the One Who has been welcomed in glory.

“That thou mightest know how thou (one) oughtest to behave thyself in (the) house of God” (1Tim. 3:15). There is no suggestion in this verse that Timothy was at fault in his behaviour in the House of God. Paul the Apostle was passing on the responsibility to Timothy, the younger man. This charge which he was handing on to Timothy was to carry the burden and responsibility of teaching the true character of the House of God to others. Paul and Timothy had served together about twenty years. Timothy displayed no youthful impatience. He had no jealousy or resentment when he was given guidance.

It is an important lesson as to how to work together and for the younger to accept scriptural encouragement and warning. Timothy had an affectionate and modest nature that could have taken refuge in timidity. Being warm and caring, there was a danger that he could become weak for “Truth”. Evidently he had some physical weakness. This could have been a disadvantage in stressful labour. Godly behaviour in the House of God will not display an outgoing nature, a verbose delivery, secular learning or even gift. In spiritual development of young believers we should seek to encourage that which is from God and for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But thou, O man of God, flee these things (fleshly things); and follow after righteousness (moral rectitude, as Joseph), godliness (reverential fear, as Josiah), faith (confidence in the promises of God, as Abraham), love (spring of faithful service, as David), patience (steadfastness under trial, as Job), meekness (not assertive of personal rights, as Moses). Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1Tim. 6:11-12). In our lives and assembly testimony we gather to the pillar of truth in the arena of conflict. We are called to wage the warfare, verify the Divine Call, witness a noble confession out of love to our Lord Jesus Christ and testimony to His Name. Selfish material living for the believer is not real life, but this is true life, life of value, meaningful life that continues even through death unto “Eternal life”.

Questions and Answers

Question: Should assembly believers become involved in politics?

Answer: “The powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1). In Romans 13 Paul deals with the involvement of the believer with the government of the day. Keep in mind as you read this chapter that the Caesar who ruled when these words were written, Nero by name, was a cruel murderer. The Roman Empire was populated by many whose lives were subject to the most unjust restrictions, and whose future was often held in the hands of men who cared little for their well-being and murdered believers because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As far as the government is concerned we are told that as believers we must be obedient citizens, and three reasons are given as follows:

The first reason (Rom. 13:1-4), is that the government is ordained of God to be a terror to those who carry out evil deeds. It is therefore in place to preserve law and order by praising the one who does well and by punishing the one who commits evil. When a government acts in a way which is contrary to the Word of God we are told that “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), but this does not extend to seeking to overthrow the government. Believers in this situation will order their conduct according to their conscience.

The second reason (Rom. 13:5-7), is our conscience. The opening section has taught us that there should be no open uprising against civil authority. Here we are instructed that there should be no private rebellion. This may take the form of refusing to pay taxes, and any other levies, which are claimed by the State. Should this be our practice, our consciences are affected. The question of whether we approve of the use to which our taxes are put is not a point at issue. We must pay, no matter what we feel about the spending

programme of the government of the day. Where we are employees the employer normally takes care of our tax liabilities by deducting them from our gross wage. Where we are self-employed, the whole responsibility rests on our shoulders and any temptation to avoid paying our dues must be firmly resisted.

In dealing with this subject, Paul introduces another debt which we must discharge mentioned in Romans 13:8-10. The display of love is something which we must all show, and, indeed, the responsibilities of a citizen are summed up in the law, and stated in verse 9. The regulation of our conduct by this standard is a real contribution which we can make to our society.

The third reason presented to us is the nature of the times in which we live, as in Romans 13:11-14. The fact is that the day of our salvation is nearer than when we believed. This is the Lord's coming. For the believer this will be rapture to heaven and the future establishment of His perfect rule on earth. This will affect the manner of our life. We are conscious of the shortness of time and of the need to use every moment in a way that is of eternal value. We are living in a world that has rebelled against the government of God, but we are looking to the day when that rebellion will be over. The conditions which cause so much pain and despair in the world around us will be eliminated when He comes to establish His righteous rule.

In the light of the teaching of this chapter, the question is, should we become involved in the political issues of the day? Is it not noteworthy that in this section of the epistle, dealing with our relationship to civil authority, there is no plea to become so involved? How then can we help in this sad world of ours? In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we are exhorted to pray "For kings, and for all that are in authority". This is where we can bring our concerns to Him Who is able to move amongst the councils of men. The power which is available through prayer is better far than politics. Our prayers are based on the desire to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

... Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

(Romans 5:9)

The above words form the basis of one of the great themes of the Bible and form part of the answer to a question asked by a man, centuries ago and reiterated since by many more sincere individuals – **“how should man be just with God?”** (Job 9:2), that is to say, have a ‘right standing’ before the true and living God?

The first man Adam initially enjoyed perfect communion with God his Maker. There was nothing to disrupt the harmony until he brought in enmity by his wilful disobedience to God’s command – a simple test of man’s fidelity. Man became a sinner, guilty before God and powerless to clear himself. Death came in to afflict man with the prospect of judgment afterwards.

Job, in asking the earlier question, had an appreciation of man’s dilemma due to the now conflicting moral state of man with God. The real issue is – how can God, who is inherently pure and holy, justifiably establish peace with a guilty individual by fully acquitting them from the deserved penalty for their sin, and yet righteously satisfy the demands of justice? God has willingly accomplished this in the Gospel.

Being justified freely by His grace

It cannot be overemphasised, that the works of mankind, whether in keeping God’s law or the moral law of the conscience, have not the slightest influence in the matter of man’s justification for **“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:20). God primarily gave man a conscience and later His written law code to prove to man his guilt, to show sin up for the defiling thing that it is.

None of us have ‘clean hands’ before God and therefore, first and foremost, the basis of justification had to be founded solely upon the grace of God. This is the unmerited favour of God, reaching out to a world of sinners deserving of eternal judgment, every one of us: **“... For there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:22-24).

Being justified by His blood

Being “justified freely by His grace” emphasises that as far as man is concerned, his justification is without merit and to be freely received from God on the grounds of redemption. However, as far as God is concerned, the price for man’s justification involved significant cost both to Himself and His eternal Son.

It was the Lord Jesus Christ, who as a perfect Man, paid that price and thus established the basis upon which God could reach out to a fallen world. Christ's precious blood was shed on the cross of Calvary where His life was laid down as a sacrifice for God on man's behalf. God is unable to overlook any sin: that would be totally unrighteous as all wrongs demand justice, even though it appears that so many get away with so much.

Many find God's remedy for man's sin by the shameful death of Christ on the cross offensive, yet never consider how offensive their own personal sin is to God. Some blinded by their own folly think it foolishness and too simplistic, yet never realise the profoundness of the wisdom and the power of God involved. One early preacher of the gospel once wrote this: ***"We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness..."*** (1Corinthians 1:23).

Being justified by faith

God has moved out in grace and Christ has offered Himself to establish the basis of man's justification before God. One further requirement is necessary: the exercise of faith on the part of the guilty to bring God's acquittal into effect. ***"To declare, I say, at this time His (God's) righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"*** (Romans 3:26). God's righteous demands have been satisfied by the death of His Son, and a state of righteousness can be imputed or reckoned to the believing one. Quoting later in the same epistle, ***"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Romans 5:1). Peace lost at Eden can be regained through the cross (Colossians 1:20).

The truth of substitution is brought into effect for those individuals who rest their case with the death and resurrection of Christ alone. Having repented and abandoned their former life of sin and self effort, their faith and confidence is in Christ Jesus alone accepting Him as their Lord and Saviour, their Mediator, their Advocate and Intercessor. Their acquittal by God is absolute: no created being is able to overturn or repeal the judgment that God decrees: ***"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth"*** (Romans 8:33).

Being Justified by works

Paul's teaching that a man is justified by faith ***"without works"*** (Romans 4) and James' teaching that we are justified ***"by works"*** (James 2) are in perfect harmony with each other! The Bible speaks acceptably of those who are ***"justified by works"*** in the sense of works that originate from a true faith in God and Christ, the sign of genuine conversion; this faith will influence a believer's words and actions.

If we seek to justify ourselves before God by our own works we are rejecting ***"the council of God against ourselves"*** as the Pharisees of old (Luke 7:30). God has made it plain that such works cannot bring forgiveness of sins and we will face certain wrath and suffer eternally for our own sin. It is when we accept God's verdict against us respecting our sin and guilt, and God's means of justification for us, that we confess Him and His word as being true and thus, ***"justify God"*** (Luke 7:29).