

# *Seeds*

*a collection of writings*

by

DAVID W. DYER

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**David W. Dyer**

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*Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from the  
New King James version of the Bible.*

Copies are available from the website:  
[agrainofwheat.com](http://agrainofwheat.com)

Author's email:  
[davidwdyer@yahoo.com](mailto:davidwdyer@yahoo.com)

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## PREFACE

This book is a collection of writings which have been penned over the last thirty years. Some of these articles were first published as pamphlets and sent out with our early periodic mailings. Some more recent articles have never been published in any form.

A few of the older writings have been significantly revised before being printed in this book. For example, while reviewing a few sections of some articles written about 30 years ago, I found the contents to be a little harsh or overly "zealous."

This problem was detected principally in the chapters, "Some Fell Among Thorns" and "Loving God." Consequently, an effort has been made to change the tone of these writings to better correspond to what we now feel to be the heart of God.

In the case of the chapter, "Are You Deceived?" this was not changed so much as enlarged. The present chapter is almost three times longer than the original article.

Every effort has been made in all of these chapters to make the messages much more concise and clear.

This volume represents much time and effort and seeking of the Lord. It is being distributed with the intention of building up the body of Christ and preparing her for His soon coming.

It is the prayer of all those involved in this ministry that the reader will find much edification and blessing in these pages.

David W. Dyer



# 1.

## NEVERTHELESS

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, we learn that, as the Children of Israel were preparing to enter the land of Canaan, God gave them some very specific instructions. Among these directives was an admonition concerning worship.

You see, the inhabitants of the land whom they were about to replace had certain habits of worship which God was concerned that His people not imitate. Evidently, when the Canaanites noticed a cozy grove of trees or an elevated situation, they would choose these settings to erect their idols. These naturally pleasing, prominent locations became the centers of their idolatrous worship – the “groves” and “high places.”

Concerning these things, God commanded them: “You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. ...You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things”

(Deut 12:2,4). The Lord made it perfectly clear that they were not free to utilize these locations. He said, "Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; *but in the place which the Lord chooses...* there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you" (Deut 12:13,14).

God had in mind a definite kind of worship for His people. True Old Testament worship was to be centered around a certain, specific place. Again He admonished them saying: "But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit... then *there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide.*"

"There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord" (Deut 12:10,11).

According to the sacred scriptures, God's people were not free to pick and choose their own places and means of worship. No one was free to do "whatever is right in his own eyes" (Deut 12:8). Instead, there was a definite, specific limitation placed upon them. Their worship must be done in a distinct, special location (see Deut 12:5-7).

Of course most of you readers will be aware of the fact that the place ultimately chosen by God for this purpose was Mount Moriah in the city Jerusalem. It was there that King Solomon built the temple, it was that "place" which God honored with His presence (II Chron 5:13,24) and it

was that location which became the center of all true Jewish worship.

Nevertheless, as with most of God's other instructions, the Jewish people did not obey this command. Before the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Tabernacle was the designated place of worship. Instead of taking the trouble to journey all the way to where the Tabernacle was erected, they began to utilize the old, convenient Canaanite locations.

Eventually this became the commonly accepted practice (I Kings 3:2). Soon even the leaders, who should have known better, were carried away with this defection. Samuel sacrificed in Ramah and Gilgal (I Sam 7:17; 11:15). Solomon not only worshiped in many different high places including Gibeon (I Kings 3:3,4) but he even went so far as to build idolatrous ones for his foreign wives (I Kings 11:7).

(It is important to understand here that even though the Israelites went to these locations to sacrifice, they were not necessarily worshipping idols. Although the sin of idolatry did occur, it appears that the Jews often frequented these "high places" to seek the true God. Their intentions appeared to be right even though their actions were wrong.)

Now how does such a thing apply to us today? We are told that all scripture is given for our benefit so it stands to reason that this admonition concerning the proper place of worship must have some application to our present situation. In order to understand the answer here, we must

realize that many of the Old Testament religious instructions are actually types or shadows of a future spiritual reality.

The lamb offered on the Passover is one of the most obvious examples of this, clearly pointing to the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Concerning our present discussion of the proper place of worship, the New Testament also provides us with the fulfillment of this type.

As it was under the old covenant, so it is in the new. God has instructed us concerning a definite place of worship. There is a specific location ordained by our Lord where we *must* worship if we are to be obedient and therefore be pleasing to Him. This is a very important point. Today also, God has ordained a specific location for true worship to occur. Unless we worship in this place, we are rebelling against God.

Jesus Himself unveiled this truth in His discussion with a Samaritan woman. When she questioned Him concerning the religious center Jerusalem, He replied, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (Jn 4:23).

Here is the location! Here is the spiritual fulfillment of the earthly type! True worship must today be done in the Spirit or it is done in disobedience to Jesus. Paul the apostle confirms this in Philippians 3:3 where he says: "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

Being "in the Spirit" means that we have entered into the presence of God. It means that our innermost beings are yielded to and open to Him. It means that He is the source, content and the leader of what we are doing. It signifies that we are submitted to Him completely and are humbly enjoying His person without barriers.

On the other hand, being in the Spirit does not mean that we have entered into the "mood" of some occasion. It does not denote that we are in harmony with some special ambience, that we are tuned in to some emotional experience or that we are going along with things which are happening around us. Instead, it means that we have genuinely entered into the presence of God Almighty.

## THE HIGH PLACES

If then the city of Jerusalem represents for us the proper place of worship, i.e. the Spirit, how are we to understand the meaning of the warning against the use of the "high places?" The groves and high places are symbolic of the other "locations" in which worship could be done. They are a substitute for the real thing. They are the religious replacements for true spiritual worship.

These are the earthly trappings which provide a "form of godliness" but which are devoid of Holy Spirit power (II Tim 3:5). They offer the Christians of our day a convenient, socially acceptable mode of worship which does not demand that they have an intimate, spiritual relationship with God.

It seems necessary here to take a moment and discuss some of the more common of these present-day "high places" to provide a clearer understanding of our subject. But before we proceed, I must warn you that these things may offend you. Therefore, if you choose to read on, please do your best to be willing to hear from God and to change any of your activities which are shown to be displeasing to Him.

Some of the items which today provide a substitute for spiritual reality in Christian meetings are: liturgies, rituals, forms, pre-planned "services" and human leadership. These things offer men an alternative for being in the Spirit. They are practices which appear religious but do not require that the participants have any real relationship with God, any obedience to His will or any desire to live by the Spirit instead of the flesh.

They are earthly, human replacements for an essential spiritual experience. They are "places" or ways of worship which are common in today's church, but which are forbidden by God. No other worship is acceptable to Him except that which He has prescribed. True worshippers must worship in the Spirit.

People tend to assume (either consciously or unconsciously) that by approaching God through a particular format, in a special building or according to a clergyman's direction, their relationship with God will be enhanced. In fact, they have often been taught, either directly or by example, that such things are essential for genuine worship. However, the only place in which

real fellowship with God is possible is in His presence. And being in His presence requires nothing less than that we be in the Spirit.

When we come to other “places” to worship, we at the same time replace Him with them. We gradually begin to rely upon these practices and performances as our assurance that we are in a right relationship with our Savior. These things then become the supporting structures of our Christianity replacing the necessity of actually walking in daily intimacy with Him. In this way, the urgency of being in the Spirit is subtly superceded by superficial religious practices.

I doubt if anyone would question the fact that people can participate in the above-mentioned practices without even being real believers. What might not be so apparent is that Christians cannot be in these other “places” and be fully pleasing God at the same time.

It is not “O.K. with Him” if we engage in religious formalities which are devoid of the Holy Spirit or which rob Him of His rightful place. To the degree that we “do what is right in our own eyes” and involve ourselves in unspiritual worship, we simultaneously, to the same degree, push God aside. When we worship at these other “places,” we disregard His authority and disobey His clear commandment.

## **TRUE WORSHIPPERS**

In order to better understand these statements, perhaps it is necessary here to take some

time and investigate true, spiritual worship together. Firstly, in order to worship in the spirit, we must be born of the Spirit. No instruction classes, church rituals or family ties will avail. Only those who have been genuinely born again can engage in true worship.

Secondly, genuine worshippers must be filled with the Holy Spirit. If we are to truly enter into the Spirit, this requires that we open ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, in order to have true worship, we must be led by the Holy Spirit. This is perhaps the most neglected item in the church of our day. If we claim to be in the spirit, but do not strictly follow the leadership of the Spirit, we are deceiving ourselves. We cannot remain in His presence while rejecting His authority. We must be extremely sensitive to His leading if we are to worship in the place where He has chosen to put His name. Jesus is not the observer of our worship but the leader and High Priest of it.

This last item is precisely where all the other religious “places” of worship fail the test. For example, when the “order of worship” is arranged in advance, God is deprived of His opportunity to lead. When we simply go through rituals and recite certain things, the living presence and authority of Jesus are not given their place.

If we just sit through services, watching others perform various ceremonies and entertainments, His rightful leadership is denied. By engaging in these things we quench the Holy Spirit. We limit

Him by our own human practices. In essence we say to our Lord, "We are going to worship here in this way and if You want to manifest Yourself in our midst, You will have to fit Yourself in wherever You can." We have chosen our own "high places" of worship.

Some may attempt to counter this assertion by insisting that God surely can lead us to arrange some things in advance. For example, He might give one or two of the men a message for the rest. Certainly this is true. God can and does sometimes prepare us in specific ways for our worship together.

But this does not justify the fact that most of Christendom meets week after week, year after year under the same format, using the same liturgy, singing from the same book and passively listening to the same individuals minister. Surely all this vain religion cannot be explained by the simple truth that God can prepare us spiritually before our meetings. It is clearly a case of choosing our own ways and means of worship. Such behavior is a violation of God's command.

A proper church meeting, one which is in the Spirit, operates something like this: real believers gather together, open their hearts and their meeting to Jesus, and then He comes both to fill them and to lead them in their worship.

In this situation, each one is capable of ministering his or her portion by the Spirit's leading (I Cor 14:26-30). Each one speaks, begins a song or hymn, prophecies, etc. according to His direction. No one is free to do their own thing or dominate

the rest with his or her gift or ministry. In this way, what God has revealed to each one and what great things He has accomplished in every life, are shared with all and become the property of all. The supply of "every joint" is essential for the true building up of the body (Eph 4:16).

Yes, there is leadership here. There will always be those more mature and sensitive to the Spirit who can and should help direct such gatherings. In fact, this is essential if the order and purposes of the Lord are to be maintained. But this too must be done by the guidance of Jesus, not by human hands. Everything possible must be done to preserve God's "place" in our meetings. We must worship Him in the Spirit if our worship is to be acceptable. This is the Jerusalem of today. It is the worship which He has commanded.

## MANY REVIVALS

In the Old Testament we have a record of many revivals which took place during the times of the Judges and the Kings. As we have already seen, the Israelites frequently departed from the commandments of their God. In order to counter this propensity to fall away, throughout their history Jehovah orchestrated many revivals.

Again and again He raised up men and women who worked to bring the nation back to God and to obedience to His laws and statutes. Among those whom God used to fulfill this task were Ehud, Gideon, Deborah, David, Asa, Jehosaphat, Ahaz, Jehu and Hezekiah.

These individuals were chosen and anointed by God to do works of spiritual restoration. They were His instruments to break down the idols, destroy the sodomites and false prophets and turn the hearts of the people back to their God.

It is thrilling to read through the books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles and see how these people were used of the Lord. Yet at the end of so many of these accounts of revival a certain passage appears. It reads something like this: "Nevertheless, the high places were not taken down and the people still burned incense under the groves" (I Kings 15:14; 22:43, II Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:4,35).

In spite of the fact that there had been revival, even though some of what was on God's heart had been restored through the ministry of these individuals, there was almost always one item which remained unfulfilled. There was always this "Nevertheless... nevertheless... nevertheless." There was inevitably a falling short of a complete return to all that was on the Lord's heart. God's people still clung to the natural, human, forbidden ways of worship.

## A PROPHETIC HISTORY

As I read these Old Testament accounts, I cannot help but suspect that these stories are like a prophetic history of the Christian Church. So much of what they experienced is similar to what we are going through or have been through since the time Christ died. It appears that Christians,

just like their Jewish counterparts, have a great proclivity to fall away from God. They seem to have a deeply ingrained tendency to migrate from the spiritual to the natural, from the heavenly to the earthly. It did not take the early New Testament churches long to fall from the freedom of their glorious beginnings to the bondage of the law and other superficial, religious things.

It is evident from the scriptures that Paul the apostle had to spend a lot of time countering such tendencies. His emphasis upon Christ being the substance, center and fulfillment of all things was always threatened by those who wished to implement outward, superficial ordinances and practices.

This strong tendency is still with us today. We do not have to look long or hard to discover multitudinous modes of worship besides a simple openness toward and obedience to the Spirit of God. The place where our Lord has established His name, the singular location where true worship can be acceptable to Him, has been replaced with many and various types of religious high places.

Oh yes, no doubt people are still worshipping the one true God with their forms and formulas. Perhaps many of them have managed to avoid the sin of idolatry. Because of this, it is often difficult for the undiscerning believers to understand what is wrong with what they are doing.

But for those who know the heart of God such earthly worship is a source of continual grief. In such situations the reality of the Holy Spirit has

been preempted by empty, earthly methods and practices. These are today's groves and high places.

They are things which have an earthly, natural attraction, but are not what God commanded. They are a substitution for the kind of worship God has ordained.

No wonder so many of our churches today are so weak. No wonder we are turning out spiritual babies instead of mature saints. In view of all this, it is little surprise that the church has not evangelized the world, is filled with sin and appears so powerless against God's enemies.

We have been living in disobedience to God. We have been following our own ideas instead of His. We have chosen our ways and means of worship and supposed that they would produce the same results as Christ's. But God has ordained spiritual worship for a good reason. Only in this way can He be all He wishes to be among His people. And only in this way can they mature into what He desires them to be.

## THE REVIVALS IN CHRISTIANITY

The days of the prophets and kings were not the only times of revivals. The Christian Church has had many of her own. A short reading of church history will readily confirm this fact. Just in recent times we can remember names such as Evan Roberts, Duncan Campbell, Charles Finney, John Wesley, George Whitfield, Andrew Murray, Charles Spurgeon and Dwight Moody just to mention a few.

All of these men, and many others did mighty works for God. They had caught a glimpse of something more than what was commonly practiced and they strove to bring the hearts of the people back to Jesus. God anointed them and used them powerfully to bring a renewed understanding of His love and power to both His church and also to the unbelieving world.

Thousands were saved in these revivals and countless others were touched by the Spirit of God. Yet, in so many instances there was a falling short of His intentions. Again and again there was real revival. Nevertheless... the superficial, human structures were not disassembled and the people still clung to outward religious practices. The other "places" of worship were left intact.

It is true that Martin Luther and other men of God made some progress away from the emptiness and deception of formal religion. Yet almost inevitably, a complete break was not made. The restoration back to God's heart, back to a purely Spirit-filled, Spirit-led worship was not achieved.

In all fairness, it must be stated that some progress has been made along these lines in recent church history. Many groups have introduced a certain amount of spiritual freedom into their meetings, especially during times of praise and singing. These movements are very commendable. This direction should be applauded and encouraged.

However, it is still extremely rare to find a meeting of Christians where the Holy Spirit is allowed complete freedom and authority

throughout. Usually, after a “time of worship,” meetings tend to revert back to following forms and programs or to being dominated by one or two leaders. This results in the authority of Jesus being limited, the Spirit being quenched and limited and the “place” of God’s choosing lost. Such a restoration is incomplete because it still leaves the groves and high places intact.

## THE MINISTRY OF JOSIAH

During the reign of the Kings, only Josiah followed the Lord completely in this matter. We read: “Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him” (II Kings 23:25).

Not only did he remove the idols, burn the wooden images, stop the practice of ritual prostitution and destroy the idolatrous altars, but he also got rid of the high places (II Kings 23:8; II Chron 34:3). Finally God had found a man to do all that was in His heart and carry out His judgments. At last He had found someone who would be pure, completely free of all that took the place of His commandments.

Praise God! No more nevertheless... nevertheless... nevertheless. No more partial restorations. No more half-way measures. Here at last, what God desired was fully accomplished and what He had commanded was completely obeyed. What a blessed time of revival this proved to be. Even the

Passover observance was again instituted and the people enjoyed a tremendous time of feasting before the Lord (II Kings 23:22).

Now don't you think that our God might desire something similar to this today? Don't you suppose that a full restoration of true spiritual worship is something which is on His heart? Our God is the same, yesterday, today and forever. His plans and purposes have not changed. He may tolerate the deviant behavior of His people. He may permit a condition of mixture and impurity to continue. He certainly does continue to love us and lead us. But isn't it likely that deep in His heart He desires something much more than that? How He must long to be obeyed and enthroned completely among His people.

Dear friends, new wine does not belong in old wineskins. The fact that God permits us to go our own way and often blesses us even when we are not entirely obedient, does not change what is upon His heart. We cannot excuse ourselves just because what we are practicing is the same as everyone else.

I firmly believe that before Jesus comes again, He would like to purify His people. He would like to cleanse His temple of all things that offend. He would like to establish among us a pure worship which is completely acceptable to Him. Finally, I would like to suggest that God is right now looking for some who will be fully obedient, some who will rise up and stand for Him. No doubt God is searching for the Josiahs of our day.

## 2.

# THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

Over the past several decades, the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” has become a popular topic. It has been taught, debated and discussed by almost everyone in the Christian community in some fashion or another. In fact, it is difficult to find a believer anywhere who does not have some (usually strong) opinion about this subject.

Even though this is so, it appears that there is an essential aspect of this baptism which has been neglected – that is the baptism of fire.

John the Baptist declared: “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” (Lk 3:16,17).

Here we find a strange pronouncement. John says that God’s Son, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, is coming and when He comes He is going

to baptize men and women with fire. What is the meaning of this fire? Why is it that God would want to pour out fire from heaven upon those who believe in Him? This is what we will be investigating in the remainder of this chapter.

God desires to purify His sons. He not only wants to gather from among men those who will believe, but He also desires to purge and purify them so that when they appear before Him, they will be holy.

I believe that this baptismal fire is the same as the refiner's fire mentioned elsewhere in the scriptures (See Mal 3:2,3; Zech 13:9) which is an intensely hot, glowing bed of coals. It is this kind of fire that a gold or silversmith would use to purge all the impurities from the metals with which he is working. In this same way God is baptizing us with His fire to cleanse us, to purify us and to make us ready for His appearing.

## **FIERY TRIALS**

Now what does this mean to us as believers today? Peter tells us that we should not think it strange concerning the fiery trials which come upon us (I Pet 4:12). We as believers should not be amazed if in our walk with the Lord we go through times of intense difficulty or suffering.

If while we are loving God with all our hearts and seeking to serve Him we find ourselves surrounded by adversity, distress and trouble we should not be surprised. This is simply the trial of our faith (I Pet 1:7).

Once we receive the Lord Jesus Christ, this is just the beginning of a lifelong process during which God purifies us inwardly. Jesus Christ came not only to forgive us for our sins, but to deliver us from sin.

Since His resurrection from the grave He has the power not only to forgive sins but to cleanse from sin, causing us to be as He is so that we no longer live in sin. His life living within us gives us the power to rise above sin.

I am not saying here that a purified Christian could never sin, but that the tendency to sin is taken away. The desire for sin is removed and, to a great extent, their life is perfected.

Unfortunately, this kind of holy living is neither cheap nor easy. In order to attain it, our life must be tried. No one comes to holiness naturally, but only after the severest testing.

The things through which God is putting you today are exactly what you need in order to be purified. Don't think that your situation is too hard or that it is something from the devil, something ungodly.

No, where you are today is exactly where God wants you to be. The trials which you are enduring are perfect for you in your situation. I believe it was the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon who said something like this: "If God, in His infinite mercy, could find a better place for you to be today, He would have put you there."

The difficulties through which we are passing are designed by God to reach into the core of our being and touch those things which He knows are

still fallen, natural and living in enmity with His nature.

If we, by our own power, can extricate ourselves from these dealings – if we can find some way out – this relief will only be temporary. God will again work in our situation and in our environment to bring us back to that point where He can put pressure on that particular area of our life which needs refining.

Some believers, for example, while having difficulties in their marriages, have thought that divorce would be a way of escape from the pressure in which they found themselves.

Later they realized that this was the wrong thing. Second and third marriages began to fall apart in the same way. No happiness or relief is found in many cases because those people were simply running away from the hand of the Lord.

Oh that we could realize that the extreme circumstances through which we are passing are from Him, and that He is allowing these things to come upon us because He loves us and He desires that we would be holy. He is pouring out His baptism of Holy Spirit fire upon us to purge our lives, to purify us, to burn within us so that only that which is of eternal substance will remain. Instead of complaining and seeking a way out of our trouble, we need to learn to recognize the work of His hand and to thank Him for it.

## GIVING THANKS

The scripture reads, "...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus

for you" (I Thess 5:18). In another place it says, "... be thankful" (Col 3:15).

If by His mercy, in the midst of the fire and the torment of some present circumstance in which we find ourselves, we would turn our heart to God and say, "Lord, thank you. Thank you for allowing me to undergo this testing so that I might be purified, so that the dross in my life can be burned away, so that the evil which is in me can be removed and I can be like You."

If we can do this, we will find the help that we need. The scriptures tell us that we, God's people, are being made perfect through suffering.

A friend of mine once told me something which I think I will always remember. She said, "You know our Christianity is not revealed in how we act, but how we react." At the time I wondered why this dear sister was saying this to me.

The true Christian life doesn't consist of learned behavior patterns, but of what we actually are within. It's very easy for us to deceive ourselves and others by pretending to be very holy and religious. It is fairly easy to put on an act.

But nothing will expose our inward condition more than a little pressure. When our wife is angry, the children screaming, the dog barking, the telephone ringing and the food burning on the stove – when we are under intense pressure – it is then that what's inside us comes out.

Many times God will apply pressure to our lives to show us just exactly what we're like, to reveal to us the kind of things that are lurking in our hearts.

He does this for our own good. God is not punishing us. He is loving us. In His infinite mercy He is causing us to see the evil in our own heart so that we can turn it over to Him. Once we are so exposed, we can ask for His forgiveness and yield that portion of our life completely to Him.

Then we can begin cooperating with the workings of His Holy Spirit as He cleanses that sin from our lives. Brothers and sisters, this is God's mercy. The circumstance in which you find yourself just may be the hand of God's love, the expression of His heartfelt affection for you, so that you can gain an eternal weight of glory.

Of course, no suffering seems like very much fun when we're going through it. It is usually difficult and painful. Often we long to get out of the situation and away from the things that are causing us discomfort.

But the true answer rarely lies in escape. It lies instead in turning our hearts to the Lord and finding, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the midst of the fiery furnace, someone "...like the Son of God" (Dan 3:25).

If when we find ourselves in the midst of fiery, painful, difficult situations, we yield to the Lord and open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, He will fill us, He will strengthen us; He will supply us just enough so that we can get through.

This is the real substance of a victorious Christian life. It is not that we escape. It is not that we learn how to manipulate our environment to keep from being touched by any pain or suffering.

It is that we learn in our trials and tribulations to enter into the Spirit, to find a rest in God and to be lifted up above our circumstances by faith.

Many great saints of God down through the centuries have been imprisoned, beaten or even tortured for their faith, and yet have found in the midst of these things a great uplifting. They have found themselves being borne up above their circumstances and their situations.

Some while being burned at the stake experienced their soul being filled with joy and sang praises to their Savior. This is genuine victory over ourselves and the enemy.

We must realize that it is not enough when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances, simply to “undergo.” It’s not enough just to wait it out and get through to the other side. This kind of Christianity actually does nothing for us.

It is only when we enter into God in the middle of our temptations that we are gaining anything. Simply making it through to the other side does not cause us to be more like Christ.

Even unbelievers go through painful trials. But when we turn our heart to Jesus, when we thank Him for what is happening, when we yield our being wholly to Him, then and only then is there any eternal change wrought in our being.

## **FIRE FOR PURIFYING**

Jesus said: “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled” (Lk 12:49 NIV)! There is no doubt that God wants

to purify His children. He not only wants to save them from what they have done but also from what they are. He wants to purify them inwardly so that they will be of the same nature and substance as He.

Ephesians 5:17 says concerning the church that Jesus desires to "...present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Such a thing requires the baptism of fire. Not only must we be baptized with the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's life and power, but we also must be baptized with fire – that purifying, refining, inward burning which melts us, changes us, burns away the dross and causes us to be like Him.

When Jesus Christ comes again to dwell among His people, He wants to find them ready. He desires them to be the kind of holy people He can trust and use. He is longing for those with whom He can have intimate communion.

No doubt all of us find these sufferings and trials difficult. Certainly this way is not easy. However, we should know that this purifying process, the trying of our faith, is much more precious than any earthly substance. It is working for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The sufferings through which we pass in this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed in us and through us (Rm 8:18). Our few short years on earth are just a time of preparation for something that is coming

which will be of great and unimaginable joy. Those who submit themselves under the mighty hand of God today will find some day that it has all been more than worth it. What God has wrought in them will have eternal consequences. They will be the ones who are able to experience freely all of what God has prepared for us.

Truly we should not think it strange when difficulties come our way. Rather we should rejoice and be exceeding glad realizing that it is God who is working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. It is the loving hand of the Heavenly Father preparing, purifying, and refining us for that glorious day.

I believe that if you are able to turn your heart and give thanks to God for the things that He's doing in your life that you will come to know Him in a way you have never known Him before. If you can praise Him and thank Him for the work that He's doing, instead of murmuring and complaining as the children of Israel did in the wilderness, you will find a supernatural supply of inward strengthening.

Actually, to refuse to recognize the hand of God is rebellion. But to submit to Him, thank Him for our circumstances and look for His grace to endure every situation is the kind of obedience that He desires. And for those who do turn to Him in this way, Christ has a special blessing. He will come and supply them with all that they need to endure in the face of the severest tribulation.

Brother in Christ, do you think your wife is difficult? Sister, do you think your husband is

unbearable or that your kids are too much? Do you think that your job is the problem or that you don't make enough money? Let me tell you, God is working in your heart. He is doing something of eternal significance and value. Don't be fooled by the outward appearance of these things, but rather turn to see the invisible hand of God working in your life.

Almost without exception, I have found that when I have had difficulties with other people, I myself had something that needed to change. Many times I have discovered that there was something in me on which God was working – something in my own heart that needed purifying.

I have found that when I got my heart right with God, somehow miraculously, the other people around me with whom I was having difficulty begin to change also. The scripture truly says: "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Mt 7:5).

Jesus promises us the baptism of fire. It is through this fire we must be passing if we are going to be ready. We are told that one day when we stand before Him we will be tried by this very same fire (I Cor 3:14). If while we are on this earth we yield to Him and allow Him to purify our lives, the fire of His presence will find nothing to kindle upon in that day. We can stand unscathed and unashamed before our God.

I'm going to close with a picture which I really like from the book of Revelation (Rev 15: 2-4).

This passage is about some saints of God who were standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire, singing a victory song to the Lord.

When this world is finished, God's judgment upon rebellious men will have taken two forms – water and fire. But here we see some of God's people who have been so purified that they can stand in the midst of the sea of glass mingled with fire and sing His praises.

The judgments of God have found no place to kindle upon them. They are so purified, so perfected, so yielded to Him, that in the midst of the trial of fire, they can sing and worship. Brothers and sisters, can you do that today?

May the Lord make us some of these.



### 3.

## THE WAY OF CAIN

Long ago in the garden of Eden, the first man Adam and his wife Eve fell. They had sinned against the most high God by doing the one thing He had commanded them not to do. In so doing these first two people damaged their relationship with God and became aware of their own nakedness.

Although they made an attempt to cover themselves by sewing fig leaves together, when they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves and were afraid. Man, who had been created by God and enjoyed sweet communion with Him, was now hiding himself from God, naked and ashamed.

As we now know this did not come as a surprise to the Lord. He knew beforehand that the man whom He created would disobey His commandment and fall into sin. Since God is not confined by time and simultaneously comprehends both the end and the beginning of everything, He had already prepared the way of salvation.

In this instance, on behalf of these first men, God must have killed some kind of animal since we are told that He made them coats of skin. By taking the life of another creature, God provided Adam and Eve with the covering they so desperately needed.

Now I would like to suggest to you that this animal which God killed was a lamb. Although this cannot be proven I feel it is a good possibility. It harmonizes beautifully with the rest of scripture and God's ultimate plan of redemption. This act was no doubt pointing toward the time when He allowed His own Son, the Lamb of God, to be slain for a covering for our sins – the hiding of our own nakedness and rebellion against God.

You can imagine Adam and Eve's reaction to this act. These animals were their friends. They spent their time caring for them. Further, they had never witnessed death before. The terrible result of their sin, the finality and ugliness of death, became instantly real to them. Due to their sin, another creature had to die.

Further along in the book of Genesis we have a hint that perhaps it was indeed a lamb which was slain for Adam and Eve. When we examine the scriptures closely, a picture emerges. We are told that Abel was a shepherd while Cain was a tiller of the ground, a farmer.

Since man was not permitted by God to eat meat before the flood (see Gen 1:29,30 & 9:2,3) we may then inquire why Abel was tending sheep. Why did he spend his time caring for animals which were of no food value to him?

The answer is most likely found in the idea that these animals were used for clothing. These sheep must have been raised for their wool or for their skins which would have been used for covering, thus lending support to the idea that it was God who had given them this example.

Both Cain and Abel were probably aware of all that had taken place with their father and mother in the garden of Eden. I am sure that as faithful parents these two shared with their children all that had transpired and attempted to instruct them in the proper way to walk with God.

When first reading the account in the book of Genesis, about how God rejected the offering of Cain, I was often troubled because this rejection seemed arbitrary. I could not understand how He could judge between these men if they were both operating purely from instinct.

However, I now strongly feel that Cain knew as well as Abel the sacrifice that God required. He knew from the testimony of his parents that they had been covered by the slaying of a lamb and that God required the shedding of blood for the expiation of sin.

However, Cain chose to go his own way even though he knew the righteous requirement of God. He deliberately disobeyed it, ignoring the example which God had manifestly provided. Instead he offered something of his own invention, something of his own imagination, something that he himself could produce.

He may have thought along these lines: "Why should I offer a lamb? The vegetables which I

have grown are great, there's nothing wrong with them, in fact they are the best around anywhere. Why can't I offer to God my best? Shouldn't that be good enough? No doubt He will recognize this and receive it."

But, as we read in Genesis chapter 4, verse 5, God rejected the offering of Cain. No matter how good it was, no matter how wonderful it appeared to be, even though Cain brought his best, God was not satisfied. He had already ordained that sacrifice which was necessary. He had already laid down the format for true worshippers to follow and it was only through obedience that His pleasure and favor could be gained.

### **A MESSAGE FOR TODAY**

Now what does this story of long ago speak to us today? How can we believers learn from the experience of these first men and avoid the way of Cain? In the New Testament, just as in the Old, God has prescribed for all believers the proper way of worship. We find in the book of John chapter 4, verses 23 and 24, the following declaration.

Jesus says: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Please notice here the word "must." The scripture does not say "could" or "should" or even "perhaps ought to" but it specifically states that

those who worship God must worship Him in the spirit. Such worship is not optional. Anything less than this falls short of God's clear commandment.

You see, in the New Testament as well as in the Old, a lamb has been slain for the covering of sins. God has provided a Lamb! And this Lamb is to be our offering. Nothing else is adequate. No matter how good it may seem, no matter how scriptural it may appear, no matter how awe-inspiring, ornate, musically excellent it might be, no other offering will suffice. Only the Lamb will do.

This fact has an important application to us as Christians. When we come together to worship the Father we must worship Him in the spirit. As we gather together it is essential that we enter into the Spirit of Jesus Christ so that our worship and our praise, and in fact all that we do, originates with Him. He is the One who is to be leading our church meetings. Further, it is this Lamb who should be the substance of them.

But what does "being in the spirit" mean? Does it mean that we are in a certain mood? Could it indicate that we have entered into the emotion of some situation? No. It signifies that we have actually entered into the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. It means that we are full of and being guided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

We read elsewhere in the Gospels that wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name, there He is in the midst. Now Jesus does not come into our gatherings as a spectator. He is not coming to hear us go through our ceremonies

or “services.” Christ has appeared as our High Priest to lead us in our worship and praise of God.

When Jesus comes into the midst He comes as the One who is going to originate everything. It is He who should be choosing the songs and it is Himself that should be poured out in and through our prayers. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ that should be emanating from the ministry of the Word.

God is satisfied only with the offering of His Son and it is only when we come together and offer up unto Him that which flows out from Jesus that the Father is pleased. Anything less than this is just vegetables!

Perhaps some believe that the goal for our meetings is that they should be “scriptural.” They imagine that if we simply imitate what we think the New Testament believers did, then God will be satisfied. This leaves so many Christian meetings trying to “do worship” or “have ministry” hoping to somehow stumble across the blessing of God. This is a very hit or miss approach. When things don’t go well, it is not uncommon for the leaders to blame the pew sitters for lack of enthusiasm or consecration.

But the problem with this approach is this: Which of the thousands of scriptural things does Jesus want us doing right now, today? The early church did many things. The Bible is full of things God might want us to say or do on any given occasion. But how is He leading us right now?

In order to know this, we must be in the Spirit. We must be in intimate, real fellowship with Him.

In this way, we can sense His leadership, follow Him in what He is doing and thus reap the satisfaction of true, spiritual worship.

How often we, God's people, have gone the way of Cain (Jude 11)! How many times we have come together and offered up to God that which originated solely from ourselves! Our own ideas, man's inventions – things which have a merely soulish quality – have been substituted in Christ's place. What we have done or can produce ourselves is offered in the place of the Lamb which God has provided. We have offered to God our bunch of vegetables.

We have erroneously supposed that if what we do is good, if it is biblical enough, if it is elaborate enough, if it is melodious enough that God will be satisfied. No doubt we as human beings have often offered God our best. We have done it with the best intentions, humanly speaking. However, with all these things God is not satisfied and He cannot be. He Himself has shown us the Way and we must walk in it.

## MANY WONDERFUL WORKS

Oh, the cathedrals which have been built, the liturgies which have been formulated, the musical arrangements which have been made, The dance and mime routines which have been orchestrated, the messages which have been preached, all in the name of worship!

Yet God desires none of these "things." They, and many other items of this nature, are tremen-

dous human accomplishments. I am not trying to downgrade the excellence of any of them. Yet their worth is nothing compared to the beauty and glory of what God has provided.

Many of these things are just the works of men, the best which could be made, yet they cannot approach the requirement of God. Men appreciate such things with their soul, their senses, and often mistake this natural appreciation for some spiritual blessing. Yet Luke 16:15 states: "For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Purely outward things are of absolutely no spiritual value. They do nothing to enhance our worship or to attract the presence of God. The reason God rejects such things is because they are a human substitution for the true offering which He has provided. Consequently, the spirit of man is left without ministry when these things predominate our Christian gatherings.

How many times have you gone away from church "services" unsatisfied? How many times have you sat through messages and meetings only getting a few crumbs from the Master's table? How often is our worship of God formal, stilted and spiritually dead? All this only serves to prove that we have gone the way of Cain. None of our ideas or inventions, no matter how good or "right" they may be, can ever satisfy God and when God is not satisfied then we cannot be spiritually satisfied either.

Oh, but what a difference there is in the Son! When God's people come together and open up to

Him, allowing His Spirit to move in their midst, allowing the High Priest of our confession to lead in the worship, to lead in praise, to lead in the ministry, how satisfying these gatherings can be! How full of the Spirit and Truth! How anointed and enjoyable such meetings are! Man is satisfied here because God is satisfied having seen and accepted the offering of His Son.

## STRANGE FIRE

In the Old Testament we have another example given to us of vain human religion. Nadab and Abihu were sons of the High Priest. They were the first two sons of Aaron and they were consecrated with him unto God for the high priestly service and ministry unto the Lord. These two had quite a bit of experience with their father in worshipping the Lord and even saw fire fall from heaven upon the sacrifices which were offered ( Lev 9:24).

So they began to get the idea that they now had a good grasp on this religion business. They thought that they were now capable of inventing something new for the worship of God. It occurred to them to put some incense in their censers and go, evidently, into the holy temple. The result was disastrous. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them. This was God's reaction to their innovations (Lev 10:1-3).

Perhaps these things should speak to us today. We as men may have plenty of ideas to contribute to church gatherings – dramatic presentations, dance routines, preplanned “worship,” musical

performances, traditional observances, many of the props and formats which we find so common in the Christian religion today – all these things just may be strange fire offered before the Lord.

We, God's people, should come before Him in reverent fear. How careful we should be not to go the way of Cain! How essential it is that our worship be something truly spiritual that comes from God Himself welling up within us and pouring out through us! It is not sufficient that when we come together we are simply informed, emotionally stimulated or entertained.

He and He alone is the source of genuine spiritual offering. God may tolerate our religious exercises today. He is not at present sending down fire from heaven to destroy these things that many of us are doing. However, we are told specifically that one day our works *will* be tried by fire and if we have been building with wood, hay and stubble instead of gold, silver and precious stones, our work will be consumed. We read that the Lord will come suddenly to His temple and will purge the sons of Levi so that their offering may be in righteousness (Mal 3:1-3).

Please do not misunderstand me. God no doubt can lead us in our worship in singing, dancing and many other such things. King David danced before the Lord with all his might (II Sam 6:14). Deborah, Moses and many others composed songs of praise.

However they did these things because they were filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. They did not do them because they thought that it

might be “appropriate,” “sacred” or “inspirational.” They did not compose songs and invent dance routines to fulfill their obligation on a particular Sunday morning. That which originates with God and the inventions of man can appear very similar. They may even take the same outward form. Yet there is a universe of difference.

The question is not really about the form at all but about the source and substance of these things. If the source is not God, no matter how wonderful it is, no matter how doctrinally correct it might be, no matter how good it might seem, it is rejected by Him. On the other hand, anything which is inspired by the Holy Spirit is important and should be included in our worship.

This reminds me of a trip I took to Romania during the time of Soviet domination. In one of the churches we visited, there was not simply one preacher or one message. The pulpit was open to all to minister, following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Many different men rose up in their turn to share what God had given them.

That evening, one brother stood up to read a poem which God had inspired him to write. In spite of the language barrier, it was easy to sense the anointing on that poetry. God had given that poem to that brother and so it was a great blessing to all.

Those hearing him became enthused. They too sensed the anointing of God on what he read. They enjoyed it so much, they wanted more. So, following their urging, he began to read other poems which God had given him previously.

With this introduction of human leadership and desire, the presence of God began to gradually slip away. What had begun in the Spirit, fell into the flesh. Yesterday's manna did not nourish anyone.

How we, God's children, need to learn to distinguish between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean (Ezek 22:26)!

It is sad but true that many Christians have never learned to discern between the soul and spirit (Heb 4:12). Many have spent so little time in the presence of God meditating upon His Word that they have no experience of His Spirit-sword dividing asunder that which is natural and human from that which is spiritual.

Too often we have not grown in our discernment to the place where we know what it is that God is requiring. And in so doing, we have failed to meet His criterion – worship in spirit and truth.

There is a tendency among some men to appreciate things with which they have grown up or which have been in existence for a long time. Others like innovations in their worship. However, everything must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit and He alone must be supreme in all that we do.

Further, since Jesus is a living Person, we may expect that His leading will continually change. Just as our relationships with other people are in constant flux, so too God is always new every morning (Lam 3:22,23). Therefore, we must be in constant communion with Him so that we can sense and follow what He is doing today.

It is possible that many people reading this chapter do not understand what I am saying and may therefore become offended by it. If this is your situation, I beg you not to be put off but rather to come before God and ask Him to fill you mightily with His Holy Spirit.

Read the passage in Luke which declares how much the heavenly Father desires to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Lk 11:11-13). He yearns that we would know the difference between what is spiritual and what is natural, that we could present offerings which are acceptable and pleasing unto Him.

God loves us very much. He has poured out His Spirit. He has offered up His only Son. God has held nothing back from us which is necessary for true worship and a pure relationship with Him. How we as men need to avail ourselves of all that God has provided!

Oh that we would have the discernment to know that which originates from the soul and that which comes from the Spirit! It is in our spirit that we are linked to God (I Cor 6:17). And it is only through the Spirit that we can offer up the sacrifice that is acceptable.

In order to have genuinely spiritual meetings, we like our godly predecessor Abel must be laboring during the week on that which God has provided. If we come into our church gatherings empty-handed, if we have not been before the presence of the Lord, if we have not fed in His Word and sensed His Spirit moving within us, we will have nothing to offer. If we have not "raised

up the Lamb” during the week, how can we bring Him as an offering?

Many Christians in this situation are tempted to resort to offering vegetables. Lacking perhaps spiritual experiences, lacking that intimate relationship with God Himself, they are left with no lamb and can only offer that which has grown up from the ground – something earthly, something natural. These things are spiritually unsatisfying.

The fact that the Father is actually out seeking men and women who will worship Him in the Spirit should really make an impression on us.

He is right now looking for them! His heart is today yearning for true worshippers who will offer up the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of their lips, those who will yield to Him that which God has wrought in them through Jesus Christ.

Oh how we need to pray, how we need to seek His face that this kind of worship would be our experience! It can't be difficult. It mustn't be, because Christ died that it could be so. Nothing has been withheld from us. God's own offering is completely at our disposal.

Therefore, let us come to Him and fill ourselves with the Lamb of God so that when we gather together and He comes into our midst we can offer up a sweet-smelling savor, holy and acceptable unto God. May we be as Paul says, those of "... the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philip 3:3).

Brothers and sisters, I pray earnestly that these things will become your reality.

## 4.

# THE SUBSTANCE OF FAITH

Among Christians around the world today there is much talk about faith. Many preachers consistently expound on this one topic. Others have written entire books on the subject. Whole denominations are even being organized centering around this one aspect of God's revelation. "Faith" is becoming quite popular.

In view of these things I believe it is worthwhile for us as Christians to take a little time to investigate exactly what the substance of faith is. If we are going to talk about faith and have faith – genuine faith – we must understand what it really is.

It is not enough just to have a natural concept or idea, but as with all the things contained in the Bible, we must have supernatural revelation to understand it. If we are truly to know what faith is, then we must have God reveal it to us. Let us pray together that God would use this message to accomplish this purpose.

Perhaps the best way to grasp exactly what faith is to take a look at the experience of the

father of faith – Abraham. By examining just how he arrived at faith perhaps we can discover exactly what God’s way to faith is. The scripture reads: “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision” (Gen 15:1). Then we read: “And he [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

The order in which these two events took place is very significant. First, God supernaturally manifested His will and His glory to Abraham. Then, he believed. His response to this heavenly vision was faith. He reacted to this divine revelation by believing that God existed and that what He said was true.

Please notice on the other hand how his faith did not happen. Abraham was not walking in the desert one starry night looking into the heavens and suddenly thought, “There must be a God. By golly, I think there really is God. Why, I believe, I believe there is a God and He surely must want me to have many descendants.” And God did not upon hearing these “words of faith” come rushing down and reveal Himself to Abraham.

No, Abraham’s faith came in exactly the opposite way. First God revealed Himself and then Abraham believed. It was this kind of faith that pleased God and caused Him to label Abraham as righteous.

What a wonderful event that must have been when God first showed Himself to Abraham. Do you still remember the time when God was first revealed to you? If you are a Christian today it is because at some time and in some way God man-

ifested Himself and your response to this was faith. You may have said something like, "God is real. I've seen Him. He has shown Himself to me and now I believe in Him." Unless God has revealed Himself personally to you through Jesus Christ, you cannot be a real Christian.

Let's continue here with a brief definition of faith. "Faith is the response of the human heart to divine revelation." Once God shows us something of Himself then we can believe. But unless He chooses to reveal Himself to us nothing we can do or think will qualify as real faith. Unless we have seen Him in some measure we cannot believe in Him. We can perhaps give our mental assent to something we have read or heard about God but this is not what the Bible calls "faith." James tells us that even the demons have a kind of faith. They believe and tremble (Jas 2:19).

But saving faith – genuine faith – the kind of faith that justifies before God those who possess it, is faith which results from God's revealing Himself. The scripture explains that faith is not of ourselves but rather it is a gift from God (Eph 2:8). This means that it does not originate within us but that God gives it to us through the revelation of Himself.

Unfortunately, not every man's reaction to divine revelation is faith. Many people we read about in the Bible reacted to the manifestation of God's power and divinity with unbelief. Most of us probably imagine that if God would speak audibly from heaven everyone would surely believe.

Nevertheless this is not the case. Several times in the gospels it is recorded that God did just that. One time Jesus was praying to the Father and said, "Father, glorify Your name." In response to this a voice came out from heaven saying, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (Jn 12:28).

Even though the entire crowd heard the voice of God, not all believed. Some of them said, "Surely it must have thundered." Their reaction was one of complete unbelief. They had heard God audibly yet they chose not to believe in the reality of what had just happened.

Still another striking instance of such unbelief is seen when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. After this event, we are told that many of His disciples believed on Him. But there were some among the crowd who scurried off to report to the Pharisees. Even though they had seen the dead raised they did not believe. Instead their hearts were hardened and they went to report Him to the authorities.

True faith occurs when the human heart responds positively to God. It is not something which comes from within ourselves. When God through His mercy reveals Himself to us in some way, we are then in a position to choose whether or not to believe.

Yet, even this ability to choose correctly comes from God. The scripture is explicit that in some instances God hardens some individuals' hearts and blinds their minds so that they do not believe (Rm 9:18, Jn 12:40).

Not only is the initial act of revelation something from on high but it is through God's mercy alone that any of us believe. He is the only one who gives faith to men by showing Himself to them and enabling them to respond by believing. This is the substance of faith.

## FAITH IS NOT HUMAN HOPE

Many people today, misunderstanding this truth, have attempted to make faith into a human kind of hope. They mistakenly teach that if you simply read the Bible, choose passages which please you and try to claim them by constantly reasserting your agreement with the truth expressed in them, that you will thereby arrive at faith and receive something from God.

This method is as difficult as lifting yourself up by your own bootstraps. No amount of continual restatement of scriptural truths will lead us to genuine faith. Only the supernatural revelation of God can accomplish this.

The scriptures read that Jesus "manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (Jn 2:11). Once their eyes were opened and they saw who He really was, then they believed. This is the kind of faith that the Bible is talking about.

When Peter confessed for the first time that Jesus was the Christ, He responded by affirming that this revelation had divine origins. Peter had not simply thought this up himself. His confession was not a product of human reasoning and deduction. God Himself had revealed this to him.

Jesus confirmed this by stating: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17).

Unfortunately human beings are often blinded to spiritual things by worldly definitions. Just because we’ve grown up thinking we knew what faith was – that is, giving our mental assent to some idea – we imagine that this same definition will be good enough to use in our Christianity.

Sadly this kind of mental activity will never work. Only those who have seen God, and know Him, believe in a way that will cause them to be accounted righteous and enable them to receive something from God.

All too often preachers and healers of various sorts encourage believers to strain themselves, trying to make their minds believe that a certain event or healing will take place. Many times these people are greatly disappointed. In some instances they are even condemned for their failure and told that they don’t have enough faith. It is explained to them that, in essence, it is their fault. They simply did not try hard enough.

On the other hand once God reveals to you (either through the scriptures or directly by His Spirit) that something will take place you can then know beyond any doubt that it will happen. You can respond to this revelation in the same way Abraham did – by believing. It is this kind of supernatural assurance that is the substance of faith and it is only when we have this assurance that we have true faith.

In all fairness it should be said that there is great value in encouraging people to believe when it is done properly. Many times God reveals Himself to Christians, showing them something which they can apprehend by faith, yet they do not believe. Their hearts may be bound by fear, bitterness, depression, disappointment, darkness or any number of other things which keep them from responding to what God is revealing.

Those who are in this situation should be exhorted to lay hold of that which God is showing them. They need to be encouraged to exercise their faith – to respond with their will, choosing to believe God.

## THE SOURCE OF OUR FAITH

Of course in this situation, as in other examples about which we have been speaking, God must be the initiator of this faith. It is not enough just to hope something will be true and try to get ourselves to believe it.

But if the Lord is prompting us, if He has already shown us something of Himself and His purposes, then we must believe if we are to continue walking with Him in all the fullness which is available to us.

Faith does not come merely from reading the Bible. Now before you get offended with this please allow me a moment of explanation. Truly "...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rm 10:17). But the reason our faith can be increased by reading or hearing the scrip-

tures is that God reveals Himself to us through them. Pages from a book can never transmit faith unless God chooses to use them to show us something of Himself.

It is a great mistake to study the Bible, attempt to figure out what God's will is, and then try to "believe" it. This is just a natural, human effort. Such endeavors can never produce anything of spiritual value. The flesh will never produce anything eternal.

How many Christians waste valuable time in this way! Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for precisely this same activity. He said, "You keep on searching the Scriptures, for you yourselves suppose that you will get possession of eternal life [or faith] through them; and yet they are witnesses that testify to me, but you refuse to come to me to get possession of life" (Jn 5:39,40 Williams). When we open the Bible we must also open our hearts to God Himself.

Of course I am not advocating any extra-Biblical revelation. We must always weigh what we think we see by the scriptures. Neither should we be ignorant of the things which are written in the Bible. Actually Christians should spend as much time meditating on the scriptures as possible.

However, it is only when we contact the person of Jesus while reading the Bible that our faith grows. He truly is the "author (originator) and finisher (completor) of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

The point of all this is that God is the source of true faith. When we desire faith we must come to

Him and Him alone. None of our own concepts or scriptural rationalizations will work. Only the supernatural manifestation of God will cause us to believe and enable us to receive anything from Him.

Let us therefore open to Him – turn our gaze away from everything else – and allow His Spirit to speak to our hearts. As we increasingly come to know God in an intimate, personal way, our faith will grow and our life will be enriched.

In closing, let me say that the substance of faith is not a small or unimportant thing. It is crucial to our Christianity. If our walk with the Lord is to be genuine and our experience of God to be real – if we are to escape deception and vanity – then we must avoid all unreality in our faith.

We must instead give our assent only to what God has revealed to us. Once He has shown us some truth, then we know it certainly. We too can be like Isaiah who “...saw His glory and [then] spoke of Him” (Jn 12:41).



## 5.

### SOME FELL AMONG THORNS

God's desire is that His people bring forth fruit. In John 15:16 Jesus says: "...I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Romans 7, verse 4 states that "...we should bear fruit to God." Peter, the apostle, exhorts us that we should be neither "...barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Pet 1:8).

What is this fruit which God wishes us to bear? What is it that our Lord desires of us? Are we as His people satisfying our Lord by bringing forth the fruit which He is seeking?

To bring forth fruit means to work the works of God. Colossians 1:10 reads: "...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Being fruitful can reveal itself in many ways. This includes leading people to Christ, building them up in the faith,

meeting their physical needs and in general doing whatever the Spirit of God is directing you to do.

Those who are following the Lord will be busy. Jesus said while He was in this world, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (Jn 9:4). He also stated: "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (Jn 5:17 NIV).

Clearly Jesus' life was an example for us of Holy Spirit directed activity which was His daily obsession. Since this is true, those who are walking with Him will also live as He did.

Unfortunately many Christians feel that their lives are anything but fruitful. Countless believers feel unused and impotent, sensing that they are not affecting those around them and that their lives are not really counting for God's Kingdom. It is to these people, those who realize that they are not truly bringing forth fruit unto God, that this message is especially directed.

In order to begin bearing fruit – to be really used of the Lord – one thing stands out as being preeminently important. It is the question "Where is your heart?" Please do not miss the crucial point of this question. Since there are so many things in this world – both spiritual and physical – which will keep us from the will of God, unless we have gotten this issue straight, we will go nowhere.

This fruit bearing about which we have been speaking is not a product of natural effort. It is not something which we ourselves fabricate. This

fruit is absolutely not things which we do for God. Instead, it consists of works which God does through us. It is the result of the Divine Life of God flowing into us and through us.

Jesus says: "I am the true vine... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:1,4,5).

We cannot bear fruit with our own energy and efforts. Even our "commitment" to Jesus – our determination to be "absolute" for Him in all aspects of our lives – will not give the results He is seeking. It is very clear: "...without Me, you can do nothing."

It is "abiding" in Jesus which produces fruit. But what does this mean? It means that we are walking in intimacy with Him. It signifies that we have constant and deep communion with God. It means that we have a relationship with Him which is satisfying both ourselves and Him. This is a relationship of love. The result of such intimate communion is the producing of fruit.

Such communion is the result of an open and yielded heart. It is natural to those whose innermost beings are given over to Jesus in complete surrender. It is the joy and privilege of those who are in deeply in love with their Savior.

This communion and the resulting fruit is the only and true evidence of the condition of the human heart. God is desiring one thing from man.

He yearns for our hearts. We read in Proverbs 23:26 God urging us toward this goal saying: "My son, give me your heart."

The truth is God does not need anything else from us. He does not depend on our abilities and intelligence. He doesn't need our good looks or charm. Our knack for influencing others and persuading them along certain lines do not interest Him. Not even our gifts and biblical knowledge are essential for Him to do His work.

You see, if and when God has our heart – when we are completely His – any and all deficiencies on our part can be overcome. His power is so great that our limitations are nothing to Him. He is able to use anyone and everyone once this heart issue is resolved. When we are living and walking in intimate communion with Him, producing fruit is the spontaneous result.

Jesus taught His followers not to worry about the things of this life. He says: "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" (Mt 6:31). He further explains: "...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33).

Yet how is such a thing possible? The natural man yearns for and depends on these things. It seems to be an inherent part of human nature to worry about and seek for these seeming essential aspects of life. To not worry about or seek these things is totally contrary to the human nature. Jesus seems to be suggesting something almost impossible.

But His point is that the Father loves us. It is He who is caring for us. It is our knowing of His love for us that produces such unworldly attitudes. It is our enjoying such loving intimacy with Him which gives rise to a trust and rest that is otherworldly and unnatural.

Why then does He teach us these things? It is because He is jealous for our affections. He wants our heart to be truly and fully His. In His great wisdom He knows that what a human heart seeks and longs for becomes its focus.

Therefore, if and when we seek after the things of this world, our heart turns away from Him. But when we trust Him completely, then these other, seemingly necessary things, do not compete for a place in our hearts with Him alone.

## THE HINDRANCES

Perhaps some who are reading here find themselves in a condition of not bearing fruit. It is possible that some sense that there are other things in their heart which are blocking a full and free intimacy with Jesus.

With this in mind, we will now take some time to go through a portion of scripture which speaks specifically about these conditions. It is the parable of the sower found in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8. Here we have detailed for us some of the items which cause Christians to become ineffective in God's kingdom.

Essentially, the state of fruitlessness is a heart problem. It is a condition which reveals that there

is something wrong in our hearts. We have lost our focus and become entangled in other things. However, with the Lord's help, once we identify the thorny things in our hearts which are choking the word, we can pull them up and enter again into a joyful, productive Christian experience.

It is possible that this job may be a little painful. Some may even be afraid. But let me assure you that it will all be more than worth it once you have entered into the things which God has prepared for you.

### **THE SOWER PARABLE**

This parable of the sower is a story with which most people are familiar. It tells of how a sower went out to sow, and as he scattered his seeds, they fell upon different kinds of ground with varying results. Some did nothing at all.

Others struggled and seemed to wither. Still others were choked and became unfruitful. But a few of these seeds fell on good ground and brought forth fruit unto God, some thirty, some sixty, and some one hundredfold.

We are told that this seed which was sown, is the Word of God. The Word of God today is being sown into the hearts of men. God is sowing His Word into us with the express intention that we bring forth fruit. He is not casting these seeds around aimlessly. But just as the sower had the anticipation of growing a crop from these seeds, so God has purposed that His Word bring forth fruit to His praise, honor and glory.

Ephesians 2:10 reads: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

It may not be necessary here to completely examine every aspect of this parable. Some of these kinds of "ground" seem to be self-explanatory. But here, I would like to concentrate on one particular kind of ground into which these seeds fell because I feel that it is a prevalent condition among Christians today. This is the case of the seeds which fell among the thorns.

These are the kind of people who receive the Word, who believe in Jesus, who are evidently Christians, but who never seem to be fruitful. They never accomplish the works that God has planned for them to do. Perhaps they are upstanding believers who attend church meetings regularly. Possibly there is no blatant sin in their lives.

Yet their lives are not full of fruit. They are not productive. They don't seem to be living in a manner that satisfies the One who bought them with His precious blood.

According to this parable, when we put together the evidence found in all three gospels, this fruitless condition is caused by four things: 1) The cares of the world. 2) The deceitfulness of riches. 3) The pleasures of this life. And 4) the lust for other things. Each one of these items is something which attracts and then captures the hearts of men, drawing them away from a true intimacy with God. As we continue here we will take a little time to examine each of these problems.

## THE CARES OF THE WORLD

To begin it is very easy for Christians to be caught up with and concerned about what the scriptures refer to as “the cares of the world.” This category covers such things as food, shelter, clothing, education, life partners, career opportunities and other similar items.

This is a subject which we have touched upon briefly before. These are all things about which it is natural for man to be concerned. For many, these concerns are so important to them that they have become the focus of their lives.

Understanding this natural, human tendency, Jesus told another parable about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field – how they’re clothed and fed by God Himself. His admonition to His disciples was clearly that they should take no thought for these things. Let me repeat that – “take no thought.” Jesus’s teaching was that Christians do not need to be focused on these things. He would take care of them.

How can such a thing be true? Is it possible that Jesus does not want us to pay attention to our future? Isn’t our education of the utmost importance? Isn’t our financial security something to which we should give serious and prolonged consideration? Aren’t these things essential for our existence?

According to the scriptures, the answer is “no.” We are admonished to “take no thought” for these things (Mt 6:25). Surely this means that

we should not spend our time and attention on them. Instead, we are instructed to make service to the Lord and His kingdom our priority.

Why would Jesus exhort us not to be occupied with things which seem so vital to our existence? How are we to live in this world without paying a good amount of attention to these very things?

The answers to these questions are fairly simple. Human beings are finite creatures. Their minds can only be occupied with a limited number of thoughts. Their hearts can only be focused upon one thing at a time.

When our attention is taken up with these earthly considerations, thoughts about God and His kingdom necessarily take second place. These things then begin to occupy a place in our hearts which should be reserved for God alone.

He intends that we should look to Him to provide us with all our necessities and that we would learn to trust in Him completely. In this way our hearts and minds will be free to seek His Kingdom first – to seek His will, to spend time in prayer and to concentrate on how we can best fulfill His commission to us.

How easy it is to be in the state in which Martha was when Jesus came to visit at her house in Bethany – to be “distracted” with many practical things (Lk 10:40). Children, housecleaning, employment, new clothes, grocery shopping and many other day-to-day chores become for some people the heart of their existence.

Their job, their business and their homes become their focus. They feel that these things are

important (and of course they are) but the problem enters in when they begin to take our time and attention away from our Lord. They distract and capture our heart. Clearly Jesus says if we seek Him first, He will take care of these things and leave us free to bring forth fruit.

## THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

A second thing which hinders our spiritual productivity is the deceitfulness of riches. I don't know if anyone who is in the grasp of riches would ever be able to see it outside of a mighty visitation from the Lord. The power of money is extremely seductive. In fact today in our world there is a whole segment of the Christian population that is actively pursuing wealth and teaching others that this is God's will for their lives.

Yet we hear the scriptures say: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (I Tim 6:9).

To pursue riches is to pursue folly. Nothing could be farther from Christ's heart than to actively seek after money. A great many men of God have been ruined by this one thing. I heard recently about a missionary to South America who, once he got there and saw the opportunities, gave up God's work and went into the import/export business.

God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He possesses everything. He will give to His servants

that which is needful for them. If we abound, we can thank Him for it. If we are abased, still the answer is the same. The Bible says: "...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thess 5:18).

Christians need to learn to be thankful to God for what they have and trust that He will take care of the rest. This is a secret which Paul discovered. He said: "...for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Phil 4:11).

When we pursue money, higher salaries, better jobs, or more education for the purpose of gaining financially, our minds and our hearts can be easily taken away from the love of and service to God. The results are disastrous. All too soon we become stale and unproductive in our work for Jesus. Nothing could grieve our Lord more than to see His children pursuing such vanity. He has so much of Himself to give us and there is so much more waiting for us when He comes again.

How we need to spend our time on this earth actively pursuing our relationship with Jesus! The scripture says that we are to set our minds on things above and not on things on the earth. It is the unseen things which are eternal. By pursuing the heavenly things we will lay up treasure that will not be consumed or destroyed.

## **THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE**

A third thing which hinders many believers from doing what they should in the service of God is the pursuit of pleasure. Our society today

seems to be centered around ease and pleasure. The TV, movie theaters, sports, music and entertainments of every kind dominate many people's lives. Some cannot feel comfortable going through a day without reading the sports page of a newspaper and finding out about the activities of their favorite teams. Others are dominated by television programs and/or soap operas.

Much time and money is wasted by Christians. By pursuing pleasure they also squander a lot of valuable time which God could be using for His own purposes. Recreational shopping, expensive dining, sports, parties, various pastimes – anything of this nature – can draw away our heart toward the desire for more and more pleasure.

One of the most precious things that we have to offer to God is our time. If He does not possess our time, He does not possess us. And unless He possesses us, we cannot be fruitful in the way He desires. How we are using our time is a sure indicator of what our priorities are.

Many seemingly innocent activities fit into the category of spiritually valueless pleasures. If we are willing to be honest with ourselves and with God, no doubt we will find many areas of our lives which are occupied with self-centered pleasure. For some it may be needless shopping. For others it could be seeing all the latest films or hanging out with friends while engaging in useless, worldly conversation.

Some believers spend countless hours watching TV programs which are morally questionable

or worse. Others spend their spare time, money and energy fixing up a vacation home where they can spend their leisure time. Exercise programs and a preoccupation with sports have turned many people's attention to the condition of their bodies.

Now I am not saying that Christians do not occasionally need to spend a little time to relax as led by the Holy Spirit. It is possible that some have been overworked in their service to Jesus. Our Lord does not prohibit us from doing anything enjoyable. But many, many believers waste far more time than necessary simply entertaining themselves.

This not only grieves the Holy Spirit, but it causes us to be unproductive, frustrating and hindering God's purposes on the earth. Once again, what we do with our time exposes where our heart really is.

No doubt many of our Lord's precious children will have difficulty understanding how seemingly innocent entertainment could pose problems to their spiritual walk. I have known more than a few to become offended when this kind of question arises.

All I can tell you is this. If you are walking in an intimate, love relationship with Jesus, your life will be filled with His work. It will be a life of abundant fruitfulness. It will not be one which is occupied with self-interested pursuits. It will be one wholly consecrated in every way to God.

No corner of your life is too small or any area so unimportant that He does not wish to wholly

possess it. As this parable clearly shows, if our lives are spiritually lethargic and unfruitful, this could well be the reason.

## THE LUST FOR OTHER THINGS

A fourth item mentioned in this parable which caused the seeds to be unfruitful is the lust for other things. Some desire to be famous. Others want a particular position in the community or success in business. Some want a new car, boat, land or house. It can be almost anything. Only you can know before God what you might be pursuing in your heart, which is keeping you from being completely His.

But if today you will bend your knees before Him and open up your heart, allowing His Holy Spirit to search and enlighten you, you can find out what these hindrances to intimacy with God and fruitfulness are. I beg you, allow the light of God to penetrate your heart. Allow Him to expose these things.

Don't be afraid. Such searching by the Holy Spirit only seems to be difficult. What God will bring to you in the place of these things onto which you are so desperately clinging is far more than you can ask or imagine.

A life filled with His Spirit and occupied with the service of God is the most satisfying and rewarding thing in which a person can engage. Yet, so many are hindered from this life of fulfillment by these paltry, earthly, menial things which choke the Word and make it unfruitful.

You may have noticed at the end of this parable it doesn't say that these people did nothing or that they weren't "good Christians" or even that they didn't grow or that they never experienced God. It simply states that they brought forth no fruit "unto perfection" – unto maturity. Maybe there are a few little green tomatoes so to speak, hanging on your spiritual vine. Perhaps you consider this to be adequate that God has used you to bring forth two or three little green tomatoes.

But Christ's desire is that we would bring forth much fruit unto perfection, that we would fulfill the ministry that He has given us. He wants us to fill up the full measure which Christ has purchased for us. A life invested in the service of God through serving others is the most rewarding experience that a person can have. No one who pursues this course will ever be sorry.

In case you are interested in this kind of existence, let me reiterate that the only way this can be accomplished is by opening up your heart completely to Jesus. He must become our first love. We, His people, must offer ourselves upon the altar of sacrifice. Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, says that this is reasonable, acceptable and pleasing unto God.

Once we offer ourselves unreservedly, then He can begin to use us, to move in us and through us to accomplish His purposes. There is no doubt that this is what God desires. He wants every corner of our heart. And there is also no question that there will be a price. God requires everything we own, everything we have and all that we ever

could be. In its place He will give us everything He is and all that He has.

If you have been touched by this message, this is truly the way. If through His mercy you realize that you have lost your first love, that your original zeal is gone, this is the answer. Come openly to God. Allow His Holy Spirit to search your heart and whatever He finds there, by His grace, yield it up to Him.

Dear friends, there is no better way. May we by His mercy choose it until He comes.

## 6.

# THE PRIESTHOOD

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Roman cathedral, it was only the beginning of what we know today as the "Reformation." His burden was to expose the error of the Church and turn her back to God. But what he saw and what he wrote were by no means a comprehensive list of how far Romanism had strayed from the Truth.

In those days much Divine revelation had been lost. Many elementary things which are taken so much for granted in our generation (such as salvation by faith) were unknown. So God used our brother to address a few of these deficiencies and recover some invaluable things. As the centuries have passed since then, God has continued to work through many others of His people to restore revelation to His body.

Such items as the use and function of the spiritual gifts, true spiritual worship, sanctification, baptism – just to mention a few – are now considered by much of the Church to be common knowl-

edge. Ever since Luther's time, there has been an ongoing enlargement and unveiling of God's truth to His people.

This process has not stopped. We, the church, have not yet arrived and will not until Christ comes in His glory. Therefore, if we desire to be in the forefront of God's activities, we must be willing to receive and act upon what He is revealing right now, today.

The following thoughts represent a portion of what I believe God is desiring to restore in these days. They are not actually what might be considered "new." Nor are they my own independent revelations. These are things which have been understood by many sincere Christians for at least a century. However, as we will see, the natural tendency of fallen man makes these truths particularly difficult to practice and maintain.

From the very beginning of time, God's desires for man have been the same. He continually yearns to walk in intimacy and sweet fellowship with us. This was His purpose in creating Adam, His intention in calling the children of Israel to Himself and even His thought for the church today.

This loving desire of His applies not only to the general body of His people but to each one of us individually. God's longing is to establish an intimate relationship with us which will change our character and nature to be like His.

At first God worked only with individuals such as Noah, Seth and Enoch. Later on we are introduced to the idea of "God's people" when we

read about Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness. But even here God was not seeking just a general mass of religious adherents. Instead He greatly desired to have a personal, intimate relationship with each one of them.

Quite early on, about three months after they had left Egypt, God spoke to Moses concerning the Israelites. Here He revealed His original and highest intention for them. He said: they "...shall be to Me a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6).

This statement demonstrates what kind of relationship God was interested in having with each one of them. He envisioned an intimacy which would qualify them to stand in His presence and execute priestly duties. These would include such tasks as ministering to Him in worship and intercession and then ministering to others from what flowed out from His presence during those times.

It was not His plan for them simply to know about Him and go through some religious motions periodically. Our God greatly yearned for His people to know Him and relate to Him personally and intimately.

But as you already know, the children of Israel failed to enter into such a relationship with their God. When He began to draw near to them and reveal His holiness on Mount Sinai, they shrank back from Him and pushed Moses forward saying: "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex 20:19). "So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was" (Ex 20:21).

The hearts of these people were not right with God and so when He began to speak to them, they could not bear it. Right at that moment they forsook the high calling which God Almighty had given to them and were content to let someone else relate to God on their behalf.

Instead of repenting after hearing the words describing God's righteousness and allowing Him to cleanse them, they instead chose to put more distance between themselves and God and interpose a mediator who would bear the responsibility on their behalf.

This defection from God's ideal bore fruit soon afterward. While Moses spent time in the presence of God, the people were enticed by their own lusts. Their personal relationship with their Creator was so limited that they were soon doubting even His existence and His ability to fulfill His promises to them.

Their solution was to create for themselves a god which was impersonal, unholy and easily manipulated – one which did not frighten them and whose presence did not demand something which they themselves could not do. At this point God very nearly gave up on them entirely and they became disqualified from fulfilling God's original intention (Ex 32:9,10).

Perhaps it was because the hearts of the people in general did not respond to Him that God then appointed a special group of priests. It may be that the tribe of Levi was chosen because they were willing to hear God, at least in some measure, and execute His judgments (Ex 32:28).

So we see that with the appointment of a select priesthood to draw near to God for the people, the general assembly lost their privilege of becoming all that their Maker wanted them to be. The Levitical priesthood became for the people a sort of barrier or buffer zone which served to make God seem more remote and them feel more comfortable.

A similar picture becomes clear when we read the book of I Samuel. At that time the children of Israel had no king. God's thought was that they would be unique among the people of the earth – a people governed exclusively by their powerful, unseen God.

However, the people chafed at this idea. To fulfill such a design required that they each establish a relationship with Him, learning to trust and follow Him. This was not easy, especially for the natural man. So these people once again rejected God's intentions and insisted on an earthly king.

They longed for a tangible leader – someone human they could see, someone who would bear the leadership responsibility for them, someone who could be interposed between them and God. Samuel was completely against such a proposal, but God comforted him by saying: "They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam 8:7).

This then brings us to our present situation. Not surprisingly, there are great similarities between Christians and the Old Testament people of God. Church history informs us that not long after the departure of the early apostles, the lead-

ers of the church began to attain an ever-increasing prominence.

Bishops began extending their authority over more than one city and eventually to whole regions. More and more emphasis was placed upon religious "positions" and the necessity of submission to those in these positions. Over the centuries, this process continued until it reached full bloom in Roman Catholicism.

Soon the scriptures were taken completely out of the hands of the people and this "intermediary" tendency we have been discussing found its ultimate expression. Such a progression should not surprise us. It is a natural, human one. In fact, unless a concerted effort is made to the contrary, all Christian movements seem to drift in this direction.

Today, although Protestantism has made some progress away from the bondage, darkness and idolatry found in the Roman system, it unfortunately still retains much of its error. While the scriptures teach the priesthood of all believers (I Pet 2:5,9), the practice of much of modern Christianity denies it.

Most of what we see today in the churches is simply the ministry of one, or perhaps a few selected individuals while the majority remain passive observers (Jer 5:31). I trust that this point does not need voluminous proof but should be evident to even the most casual observer. (By the way, if this description does not match your church experience, I rejoice with you and hope that you are enjoying all the resultant benefits).

Of course the present leadership situation among Christian assemblies is not labeled as a "priesthood." That would be blatantly unscriptural. Instead we have such titles as "pastor," "reverend" or "minister." But the function of these people is usually almost an exact parallel to the work of the priest in the Old Testament. They are the ones who "hear from God," do most of the teaching, counseling, organizing, etc. It is sad but true that in many situations the "preacher" is required to do almost everything.

Now since this is the well-established practice among believers today and seems almost universally accepted, many may wonder what is wrong with it. This is a most important consideration. In order to understand the answer, I believe that we must have a genuine concern for the interests and intentions of God.

If man were the only partisan in this situation, perhaps our discussion would not need to be so serious. But here we are attempting to understand and fulfill God's requirements and so we must approach our subject with reverence and fear.

Not only this, but it should be clear that His objectives are also for our own good and in our best interest. In fact, the more we see of God's designs, the more we will realize that His directives and requirements are not merely for His own convenience but for our eternal benefit.

God's plan for His church is twofold. Firstly, He has instructed us to carry His good news to the ends of the earth. Secondly, He intends that we would be transformed into His image. Now if we

are to powerfully and thoroughly carry out these instructions and achieve these ends, we must be people who are intimate with God! Each one of us must enter into and maintain a close, personal relationship with our Creator. We are all required to become priests. Then from this relationship will spring the priestly ministry which will accomplish God's designs.

We should not be looking to leaders or gifted individuals to get the job done. We must not rely upon international organizations and dynamic campaigns. All of us bear a part of this responsibility. The truth is that if we are not actively engaged in ministering to others, either through gospel preaching, or the exercise of other of our spiritual talents, we have fallen into error.

## **WE ARE ALL MINISTERS**

God requires every one of His people to be employed in His work. We are all ministers. We have all been called and ordained by God to do a work of priestly service until He comes (Jn 15:16).

When Jesus Christ ascended to His Father, He gave gifts to His church. These "talents" or spiritual gifts were not given only to a select few but to all (I Cor 12:7). Every function of every part is vital, just as it is with the different organs and members of our physical body.

If even a seemingly small or insignificant part is not working properly, the whole suffers. This is very true in the church today. When only the especially gifted, talented or "trained" individu-

als do all the work, there is great loss to the body of Christ and also to God.

I sincerely pray that every reader will take this truth to heart. It does not matter what you think of yourself or of your spiritual abilities. Neither is it important how you compare to others. Even those with only one small talent are and will be required by God to use it to its fullest extent (Mt 25: 14-30).

If we are cowed by comparing ourselves with others or are fearful and do nothing, we will have to answer to our Creator one day. It is both our privilege and our awesome responsibility before God to discover what work He has called us to do and begin learning by His Spirit to exercise ourselves toward this end.

Without such ministry, we will not grow properly. Oh, we may make some spiritual progress – especially in the beginning – but to really grow to maturity, we must begin ministering ourselves. As we give, more will be given to us. This is a spiritual law. If we are merely receivers – week after week listening to others who have spent time in the presence of God – our knowledge may increase but our lives will not be changed.

This is the unfortunate state of much of the church today. We have our “superstars” who are perhaps well known and are busy day and night, but we also have the “passive majority” who rely on others to do the work.

The detrimental effects of this situation may not be readily apparent, especially in a well-oiled organization, but they are there nonetheless. Many Christian meetings are populated by spiri-

tual babies who are overfed and under-worked. They come week after week to receive and imagine that because they hear good teaching they are right with God.

But far too often, these individuals still have hidden sins or serious flaws in their character. Frequently, it is when we attempt to serve others, that these things are exposed. As we begin to minister we realize how our own life needs changing and this stimulates us to seek the Lord for deliverance. If we are truly to press on into spiritual maturity, it is essential that we become priests – priests who are actively carrying out their duties in the house of God.

Not only is spiritual ministry necessary for our own growth, it is also important for the progress of others. Regardless of your spiritual abilities or function in the body, there are others who need what you have. It doesn't matter if yours is a small piece or a large one. It is absolutely necessary. Somewhere among the believers you know or in the world around you, there are people to whom your portion is important.

For example, your neighbors may be perishing without Christ as a result of your fear or unwillingness to speak to them. Or perhaps your Christian acquaintances may be seeking the very piece of understanding which you possess. Possibly many that you know are suffering because you have not taken time to pray for their deliverance or paid attention to their need. (It is always much easier to criticize or gossip than to pray or help, isn't it?).

You see, your portion is essential for the growth and spiritual well-being of others. God has given it to you for their sake and therefore it is important to exercise it. In His wisdom, our Father has constructed the church so that each member is dependent on the rest. Therefore, for “all to arrive” at maturity (Eph 4:13), the ministry of each part is indispensable.

## **SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP**

At this point some may ask, “Where do spiritual leaders fit into all this?” Leadership is both scriptural and necessary for a healthy church situation. However, it is also commonly misunderstood. The role of a leader is to lead. This does not involve dominating or controlling others but instead means to “get out in front” spiritually and go! Others will notice and follow.

The word "rule" found in I Tim 5:17 and Heb 13:7,17,24 of the King James version has perhaps been the source of much misunderstanding. This word is PROISTEMI in Greek and should be translated “to stand before” or “to lead.”

The burden of a true leader is not to “run the church,” but to assist all the rest in fulfilling their ministry – growing into all that God is calling them to be. You can easily recognize such genuine leaders because they will always be putting the best interest and spiritual progress of the rest ahead of their own. (See Lk 22:25,26.)

Leaders who are simply feeding themselves (building up their own ministry, feathering their

own financial nest, etc.) and consequently keeping those in their care passive, will come under the judgment of God. Those who elevate themselves and keep others down for the sake of their own security, authority or other considerations are in an extremely precarious situation (Jas 3:1).

Leadership must be that which is raised up by God. If it is only the product of education, appointment to a position, or personal ambition, it is certain to be a hindrance to real spiritual progress.

Human, religious organization can also be a limitation to fulfilling the desires of God. Getting the job done or keeping people active does not translate to spiritual maturity. In fact, even unbelievers can organize effectively. The task at hand is not to have huge buildings, "successful" ministries or great numbers in attendance. All these things can be achieved without ever fulfilling the Father's will.

In His plan, programs are replaced with true spiritual ministries which He has raised up in our midst. Future plans are a result of His guidance and organizational or positional authority is replaced with true spiritual authority.

When we are going God's way, people are not just slotted into some job which needs doing. (For example we need Sunday school teachers or ushers so we ask for volunteers.) Instead the ministries of each person are discovered and then they are encouraged along these lines.

Now if the Christian meetings which you attend would fall apart completely if things were done in this way then I feel compelled as your

friend and brother to inform you that it is not a truly spiritual work. It can only be a human organization which is not really accomplishing the purposes of God but only conforming to the standards of present-day Christianity.

It may be that you are meeting with a group of believers where you have no encouragement or opportunity to grow into your ministry. Perhaps your experience is just that of a “one man show” or something so organized that the life has gone out of it.

Your talent may have been neglected, misused, ridiculed or discouraged. Yet, none of this is an acceptable excuse for doing nothing. When you appear before your King, there will be no one else to blame for not fulfilling your priestly duties.

Since God has equipped and called you, He will also make a way for you to begin serving. For example, you can pray anywhere at any time. You can give to others without any official sanction. You can teach and counsel from house to house if necessary.

When you actually begin functioning in the ministry into which God has called you, the doors will open before you and people will recognize the hand of God in your life. Things will probably start slowly at first and may seem small or insignificant (Zech 4:10). But as you faithfully and diligently exercise your God-given talents, they will grow and you will grow spiritually also.

God’s will is for us to be to Him a kingdom of priests. We are all His prophets (I Cor 14:1,31). Each and every one of us has a ministry to fulfill

and spiritual duties to perform which no one else can do quite in the same way we can.

When we appear before Him we will be called upon to give an account of our works (Rev 2:23). There what we have done will testify to our true spiritual condition. We will not be able to say that we did not see the needs or that we were not qualified (Mt 25:31-46). The same God who worked mightily in the apostles and prophets also lives in every one of His children. He is able to do far more than we ask or think if only we are obedient to Him.

I beg each and every one of you to take these thoughts seriously. Consider your own life and see if you are really an active laborer for your King or just a passive observer. Have you put a "safe" distance between yourself and God and allowed others to bear what should have been your responsibility? Have you shrunk back through fear or human inability and let others do the work?

If so, take a moment right now and repent before Him. Give your whole life to God anew. Tell Him that from this moment on, you are completely willing to be a vessel for His service. Then, as He leads you, obediently work together with Him in His vineyard.

## 7.

### REMEMBER THE SABBATH

The setting was awesome. The mountain was bathed in thick smoke produced by a raging fire. The ground quaked and a trumpet Voice, louder than anyone had previously heard, drowned out the rolling thunder while the lightning punctuated the pronouncements of God Almighty. The man, Moses, made his way up the mountain and disappeared into the conflagration.

No doubt he too was afraid. It would be only natural if his knees shook and his heart pounded within his chest as he watched the finger of God appear and inscribe His commandments on two tablets of solid stone. The Most High was making it more than plain that He was serious and that His commandments were not to be violated. This dreadful demonstration of God's power was intended to produce in those who beheld it a solemnity and holy fear which would cause them to obey Him.

Such is the origin of what we know as the "Ten Commandments." However it is quite evi-

dent that they are not held in such high regard today as they were at the time in which they were first spoken. After all, many Christians seem to believe that Jesus came to do away with such frightening decrees and replace them with much more palatable, easier to keep admonitions.

In fact, it is often suspected among modern Christians (if not openly taught) that God's commandments to His people should really be regarded more as "little suggestions" rather than any kind of ironclad ordinances.

Furthermore, the assumption goes, the consequences of failure – the penalty for breaking any of God's laws – has been entirely removed through Jesus, so whether or not we measure up to His standard is not really very important.

Underlying this present lassitude of modern Christendom toward God's instructions and the evident lack of the fear of God among His people is a basic misconception concerning the gospel. What Jesus came to do for us and how He is accomplishing His objectives is not well understood and in fact is often misunderstood by far too many believers.

The notion of "consequences" of any sort concerning the behavior of Christians has been reduced to a fairy tale about how large or small a mansion we will receive or how luxurious a car we will drive when our Lord returns with His reward.

This sort of superficial gospel has produced equally shallow adherents. A lack of revelation concerning the Person and purposes of the Living

God has resulted in a message which has very little power to change the lives of the hearers. The "fear of the Lord" which should form a kind of foundation in the lives of believers has been explained away and replaced with a broad, easy way which finds no place in any genuine understanding of the gospel.

This then brings us to the purpose of this writing. It is to attempt, in a manner which is both scriptural and enlightening, to present the gospel from a fresh perspective which will speak to some of the modern misconceptions so prevalent among us. Let us pray together that God will anoint and use this message towards His eternal ends.

To begin, it is important to state that Jesus did not come to do away with the law. Instead He came to fulfill it. Not only did He not eliminate the demands of God's commandments, He actually raised them! In reality, Jesus' teachings elevated the requirements upon God's people instead of reducing them. A simple examination of a couple of the Ten Commandments will make this fact abundantly clear.

For example, the seventh commandment forbids us to commit adultery. Now it is possible for many people to keep this directive. They may entertain certain thoughts and desires about particularly attractive members of the opposite sex.

They may even have strong urges in this direction, but they, through their will power or other means, are able to suppress them and keep themselves from this sin. This abstinence would

have qualified them to be judged as obedient to the law in Moses' day.

But when Jesus came, He made things much more difficult. He declared that indulging in the thought is just as bad as having actually done the act. This made righteousness impossible from a human standpoint. If you are honest, you will admit with me that precious few have made it through life without one such thought. Here in just this single law, virtually everyone is found guilty.

The commandment against murder also forms a part of the picture. No doubt there have been times in our lives when others have offended or even egregiously wronged us, and consequently have made us exceedingly angry.

Hopefully, we have been able so far to resist the temptation to kill them. Perhaps the restraining influence of law enforcement forces, courts and jails have helped make the job of controlling our feelings somewhat easier.

However, this abstinence which in the Old Testament would have been good enough, does not meet our Lord's standard. In the New Testament not only are we not free to murder those who bother us, we are required to forgive them. Not only may we not harbor hatred and bitterness in our hearts, but our Lord actually insists that we love our enemies. How is this possible? Once again, self-restraint is not enough. An entire change of character is required.

And so it is with the rest of the Ten Commandments. The New Testament standards

are actually much higher than that of the Old. Hopefully, this small sampling will be enough to demonstrate clearly that the righteousness required by Jesus' teaching is far above that demanded by the law.

## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

I believe that most people's immediate reaction to all this is to inwardly wonder: "How is such a thing possible?" "How could anyone live in such complete perfection that not one ungodly thought, attitude or action could creep into their life?" We know that the ancient Jews strove for nearly 2,000 years to obey the Ten Commandments. It is also well documented that the history of this effort was one of continual failure.

So, since it has been clearly proven over millennia of experience, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that man is incapable of obeying God's original ordinances, how are we to understand the fact that Jesus apparently made things even more difficult? What are we to make of the fact that what God today requires of us is so far out of our reach and beyond our abilities as to be entirely impossible?

The answer to this question is quite simple, yet utterly profound. To grasp it, it is imperative that every believer arrive at a deep, unshakable understanding of the following fact: There is only one person in the universe who is capable of measuring up to this incredible criterion – God Himself. His life is the only life which automati-

cally and spontaneously expresses genuine righteousness. He is the only one who meets the test.

Do you realize that God does not have to try to be righteous? He just is! He does not have to try not to look at pornography on the internet or keep from indulging in romance novels. He is not straining not to lie, cheat, steal or take advantage of someone for His own profit. He spends no time wishing He had things as nice as His neighbors.

The truth is that God cannot even be tempted by sin (Js 1:13). He simply isn't interested. In fact, He abhors it. God manifests righteousness simply because He *is* righteous and it is impossible for Him to be any other way.

It should be no secret to us that at one time in history, this supernatural life was manifested (I Jn 1:2). This incredibly righteous life came to earth in the person of God's Son, Jesus Christ. We read: "In Him was [God's] life" (Jn 1:4).<sup>\*</sup> This man was the repository of the Father's life. (<sup>\*</sup>The Greek word "life" here is ΖΟË, referring to the Father's life.)

Furthermore, while He walked on this planet, He did not function by His own life but simply lived out His existence by the inclinations of the Divine life which was inside of Him. He disclosed this secret when He declared: "I live by the Father" (Jn 6:57). His actions and even His words were not His own but simply an expression of the will of Him who lived within Him.

He asserted: "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works" (Jn 14:10 KJV). So we see that Jesus was truly righteous as a result of

God's own life within Him which motivated Him.

## A LIFE WHICH IS NOT OUR OWN

This then forms an illustration for us today. It is totally impossible for us to meet God's standards. But if we are genuine believers, this same Jesus who lived on earth 2,000 years ago and pleased the Father in every respect, now lives within us. And it is the Father's intention that His own Son, living within us and living the Father's life through us would fulfill all of His righteous intentions.

Jesus Himself is to become our motivation. God's own life is to become the source of all our thoughts, feelings and actions. Just as our Lord was animated by the Life of the Father, so we too can be an expression of Himself.

In this way, our lives will manifest righteousness. In this way, we can meet the standards given to us in God's book. Yet it is a righteousness which is not our own (Philip 3:9). It is not we who are meeting the requirements, but Another who lives in us and through us. This is the real "righteousness of faith" (Philip 3:9). Our faith brings us into God and God into us in such a powerful way that our very manner of living is changed.

The genuine gospel is not a message of self-effort. True righteousness is not attained by the improvement of ourselves. Rather it is accomplished by a supernatural substitution. Just as Jesus pleased the Father by allowing Him to live

through Him, in this same way we too can be pleasing to Him. This is the true Christian life. It is the narrow “way” of which Jesus spoke. Any other is just an earthly imitation. God’s desire is not that we should “live for Him” but rather that He should live His life through us!

Do you see this? Are you able to genuinely fathom the depths of what this means? What a glorious liberty! What a freedom and enjoyment. We are now free from the bondage of trying to please God. Now Someone who is infinitely more capable is going to do it for us. The living Jesus who pleased the Father while in this world will again please Him in and through us.

This is an essential revelation which every Christian should see. It is also something which should begin to have a profound effect upon their experience. It is a truth which should begin to alter our behavior on a fundamental level.

## **AN AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY**

On the one hand this great fact provides us with tremendous release, yet on the other it also brings with it awesome responsibility. You see this means that God’s people are supposed to be truly righteous. They are meant to be holy. They are actually intended by God to meet not only the standards of the Old Testament law but also the exceedingly elevated standards revealed by Jesus.

In truth He did not come to do away with the law. Instead He came to fulfill it more completely and thoroughly than ever before. He came to

cause multiplied thousands of men and women to become more righteous than previously thought possible. His intention is that what could not be done by the strength of man in attempting to obey God's law, would now be accomplished by His divine power working through His people. Now God can have multitudes expressing true holiness to the world and defeating the devil through their testimony.

Hopefully, all readers will realize that there is a great difference between the idea of "keeping" the law and "fulfilling" the law. "Keeping" the law is something which involves the efforts of the flesh to obey a superficial standard. The "fulfillment" of the law is the appearance of the standard giver Himself.

Let me give you an example of this. Let us suppose that you had never met my lovely wife. To help you know a little about her, I could show you a picture. By examining the photograph, you could learn a little about her appearance, her hair color, her height and her facial features.

However, when you finally meet her face to face, she is the fulfillment of the picture. You no longer need to gaze at the photograph, she is now present with you. In fact, she would be offended if you continued to stare at the picture and ignored her.

In the same way, God gave us the law and the commandments. They are a verbal picture of Himself and His righteousness. They obviously are true and just and good, just as the photo of my wife is an accurate representation of herself.

However, in many ways the laws and the commandments are incomplete, because it is impossible to describe in human words the totality of all God's righteous person.

Now, however, the "fulfillment" of the law has come. The person depicted by the commandments appeared on the earth in the Person of Jesus Christ. This Person "fulfills" the law simply because the law was and is a kind of definition of what He is.

His actions and words are far above the law because it is a mere shadow of all that He is. At times, His attitudes and actions appeared to the Pharisees to be in contradiction to their understanding of the law. This is because they misunderstood what the law was and Who was really behind it. They only stared at the picture and ignored the Person.

Trying to "keep" the law only results in a human imitation of what God is. Even if the most strong-willed person could make themselves "do everything right," this could never result in true righteousness. It would just be a mere, natural human being imitating God. We read, "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal 2:16). Even if we could do it, it would not be acceptable before God.

What God is looking for is an actual expression of His own life and nature. This is what He saw in His Son. And this is what He is looking for also in us – the fullness of His life, saturating and permeating our being in such a way that we also become an expression of His holiness.

Yet, as we all know, the actual realization of this glorious truth is not quite as simple as it may seem. Somehow, even though we have this supernatural Life living in us, it is not always He whom we express. Far too often, low, earthly thoughts, feelings and actions – sin of every variety – work in us and are expressed through us. What then is the problem? Why is it that we do not always manifest the nature of God in our daily lives?

At the root of this dilemma lies the fact that we still possess our old life. Just as the Life of God is thoroughly and completely righteous, so our own life – the one with which we were born – is unalterably polluted with sin.

Therefore, when we allow ourselves to be motivated by it, we naturally express something which is less than supremely holy. When we live our own lives, when we permit “self” to be the source by which we live, the results are inevitably sinful and therefore rejected by God.

This then places the believer who is desiring to be holy and to do God’s will, at a kind of crossroads. Every day and in fact every moment of every day, Christians are required to make a choice. They must continually decide by which life they will live. Which life will they allow to fill them and motivate them – God’s or their own? Which life will be their moment by moment inspiration?

Our Heavenly Father, in His great wisdom, has not forced His way upon us. Instead, if we do manifest His life, it will be a result of our perpetually choosing His way. If we do begin to exhibit

His nature, it will be because we day by day chose to allow His life to fill and dominate our being. Additionally, it will mean that we at the same time decided to deny our own life its expression.

How holy and precious it is that our God and King is so sensitive to our desires. Conversely, how awesome a responsibility we have to choose rightly every day.

## **REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY**

Now we come at last to an important aspect of this article, the remembrance of the Sabbath Day. In the Old Testament when Moses received the Ten Commandments, the ordinance of the Sabbath was a requirement concerning the enterprises of the seventh day.

God ordered His people to cease from doing most physical activities so that they could focus their minds and attentions upon the worship of Himself. Simply put, they were to stop what they were doing and rest.

While this seems like it should be an easy commandment to keep, it proved to be a virtual impossibility. There was always something within the lives of God's people which was stirring them to action, even when it was in violation of His will.

In the Old Testament, God reveals that His thoughts concerning the Sabbath are more than just a physical inactivity. In Isaiah 58:13 we are taught that the Sabbath even includes not doing what we want to do or even what we enjoy doing.

We are not to be “finding our own pleasure.” Even further, we are not even to be “speaking our own words.” This is really impossible.

How is it possible that we could live without saying anything which springs from our self? How could we not seek things which are pleasureable for us? It is only when the Life of Another is motivating our entire living that such a thing is possible.

Interestingly, Jesus affirms that His life was a manifestation of just such a Sabbath experience. He says: “The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works” (Jn 14:10). He was not speaking His own words or doing His own works. Instead, He was resting and allowing the life of the Father to live through Him.

Now if the Old Testament decree was impossible to keep, what of the New Covenant standard? At that time God’s followers were forbidden to work one day out of seven, but now in the New Testament, we are required not to work at all! We are admonished to “cease from [our] own works” completely (Heb 4:10).

The standard of “resting” has been elevated far beyond the activities of one day. Now it is being applied to our entire existence. We are to enter such a rest that it is no longer “we” who are living. Not just the seventh day, but all seven days of the week are holy to God. Now there is no longer any room for us to do our own thing and be what we want to be. Now there is only room for Christ Jesus.

This then brings us to a proper understanding of the real gospel. It is a message which states that there is a “rest” for the people of God into which they need to enter (Heb 4:9). There is available to us the option to stop living our life by our own motivation and enter into the experience of being animated by God. The genuine experience of the Sabbath is none other than that about which we have been speaking. It is simply to allow God to be our life and cease from living by our own.

When properly understood, the Old Covenant mandates are seen simply as outward types of the coming spiritual realities. They were earthly illustrations given to us by God to help us understand spiritual things. Concerning the outward observance of the Sabbath Day, the scriptures teach us that this was simply a “shadow of things to come, but the substance [the spiritual reality of it] is of Christ” (Col 2:17).

Do you see this? In this light the true Sabbath observance becomes one of the most important revelations of the New Testament. Ceasing from living by our own life and yielding our faculties to the inspiration of Another is truly at the center of all the thoughts and intentions of our God.

This is why Jesus came and died for us. It was to impart to us the Father’s Divine Life so that we could become partakers of His nature and be truly righteous.

No wonder the Sabbath is one of the most prominent of the commandments, being mentioned 137 times throughout the scriptures. It is little surprise therefore that its observance was

taken so seriously by God and that it is emphasized again and again by the prophets when detailing the shortcomings of God's people.

The importance of this experience, the centrality of this truth is so profound that if a person does not understand it, then he has not begun to really grasp the message of Christ. The keeping of the true Sabbath, which results in the replacement of our old, perishable life with God's new, eternal one is absolutely indispensable.

Do you keep the Sabbath Day? No, I don't mean to ask whether or not you hold a job or work in your garden on Sunday. Neither am I interested in any fruitless discussions about whether Saturday or Sunday is the proper time for worship. These things belong to another realm entirely. If you are caught up in them, it is proof that you have already missed the spiritual reality about which we have been speaking.

Paul, the apostle, was fearful of this very thing when he said to the Galatian believers, "But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain" (Gal 4:9-11).

He was concerned that his hearers had only grasped the superficial appearance of the scriptures and completely overlooked the real message. His apprehension was that in keeping an earthly Sabbath ordinance, they were demonstrating that they had not understood its true mean-

ing. He understood that the Old Testament Law was weak, because it only operated through the efforts of the old man, the flesh (Rm 8:3). He also knew that it was only the divine life of God which could really fulfill (not keep) the Sabbath requirements

This then dear brothers and sisters is our present consideration. Are we entering into the true Sabbath day experience? Are we truly stopping our own activities and entering into the rest of God? Are we living by our own life, or allowing the Life of Another to dominate and control us? Who is our daily motivation? Whom are we expressing day by day?

Jesus is coming soon. Only those who have loved the Sabbath will be ready. Hear the promise of God!

“If you turn away . . . from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Is 58:13,14).

## **ARE THERE ANY CONSEQUENCES?**

We have been discussing the sublime possibility of living by another Life. But why is this so essential both to us and to God? The important

truth is that the old life with the old nature which we inherited from Adam is under God's judgment. Just as breaking the Old Covenant Sabbath produced consequences, still today there are serious repercussions for us when we do not enter into the Sabbath rest.

When Adam and Eve first sinned, they were condemned by the judgment which God had already pronounced: He said, "For in the day you eat the fruit of it, you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17). Through their sin, this sentence of death has passed upon all men in the human race (Rm 5:12).

Now some may believe that, through Jesus, this judgment, along with all the rest of the Old Testament judgments, have somehow been annulled. They imagine that, since we have believed in Christ, we are no longer subject to this sentence.

However, this is not quite the case. Our old life which we inherited from Adam must surely die. We read: "For as in Adam all die" (I Cor 15:22).

The reason that this sentence must be carried out is that our old life produces sin. By nature we are sinful. Meditate upon the following question for a few minutes. How many sins were necessary to destroy God's earthly creation? Just one.

Perhaps to us this sin does not seem to be of great consequence. Eve did not fall by committing fornication. She did not murder someone or steal. She simply was self-willed and disobedient. Yet this one sin destroyed everything that God had made.

Now with this in mind, let us reason together. How many sins would be necessary to destroy the new creation which God will make? Also only one. Therefore, if God allows sinful beings to enter, surely they will sin again. Sooner or later, intentionally or unintentionally, they would sin.

The only solution is not to allow any sinners in. To eliminate any possibility of sin entering the new creation, all the sinners must die. They must be terminated. In their place, God is substituting a new race – the children of God. These new creatures are “not of this world.” They have a heavenly Father, a new birth and a new life which does not sin (I Jn 3:6). These are the only ones who will be allowed to enter into God’s new creation.

Our Father’s plan is to fill us with His life and nature. But in order for this to happen, “we” must die. The sinful creature which we are by nature must be destroyed. Our old self-life must actually be put to death through the action of the Holy Spirit (Rm 8:13). Our “self” must be crucified.

Then, the new Divine life which He has given us will grow up to replace what we are. No, we do not escape death by believing in Jesus, we pass through it. In Christ, we can die and yet live (Jn 11:25). We can actually experience the death of Jesus working in us so that His life can be manifested (II Cor 4:10).

The necessity for us to die should not be foreign to our understanding of the gospel. One of the main tenets of our faith is baptism. After we believe, we should be baptized. But what does it mean? It means that we are “baptized into His

death" (Rm 6:3). It is a symbol of drowning or dying.

When we are baptized, we are declaring publicly that we recognize that we are sinful and that as a consequence of our sinful condition, we are ready and willing to die. Our immersion in water is an action which testifies to our willingness to enter into death and our faith in the resurrection power of Jesus. If you have been baptized without this most basic understanding, then you have missed the message of the cross of Christ.

It is on the cross that a life exchange was and can be made. There we can trade all that we are for all that He is. It is as we "carry the cross" that the death of Jesus is actually applied to our being. After this, the resurrection of Christ also becomes our experience.

As believers, we are not supposed to be engaged in an effort to reform the old man. We are not called to a course of retraining, restraining or re-education. No, the old man must simply die. In its place, we can receive a new Life which will become a substitute for the defective life which we received from Adam.

Our old life, which is under God's judgment, will sooner or later be eliminated. It has to go. It is unalterably contaminated with sin. Therefore, we have before us two options. One is that we can hang onto our own life, avoiding the cross and obedience to Jesus and lose our Adamic life when He comes. The other is that we can lay down our own life today and be filled instead with an eternal, indestructible life which is destined for glory.

Do I mean to say that what remains of our old life will be destroyed when Jesus comes? Yes, that is certainly the case. Jesus promises us clearly and repeatedly that "...he who saves his life, will lose it" (Mt 10:39, 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24, Lk 17:33; Jn 12:25). The word "life" here is *PSUCHÊ* in Greek and refers to our "soul-life" or our natural life.

Nothing could be clearer. From our Lord's own mouth, we have the sure witness that we will lose our old life. If we refuse to cooperate with the heavenly plan to exchange our life for His today, we will ultimately lose what we have and be left with little when He comes.

Unfortunately, many Christians are confused about this. They do not completely understand the "whole counsel" of God. They have only heard part of the gospel. Although they have heard about the new birth and forgiveness of sins, they have not understood the preaching of the cross and all that it entails. They have not perceived the urgent necessity to follow Christ, carrying the cross, in order to be free from what they are and obtain all that He is.

But to miss this truth is to miss out on most of what Jesus died for. To ignore the greater consequences of His salvation is to neglect something infinitely precious which will be impossible to recover later. May God have mercy upon us to enlighten us to the fullness of His great plan.

## **THE CONSUMING FIRE**

When we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we are told that our works will be tested

by fire. Not only this, but *what we are* will also be analyzed by this supernatural flame.

I Corinthians 3:15 reads: "If anyone's works are destroyed he himself shall be saved, *yet so as through [the] fire.*" You see, we shall all stand before our God. According to the scriptures He "is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29).

What will this fire consume? It will completely consume anything that is not of God's own life and nature. It will burn everything that is old, natural and sinful. Only the new supernatural life will be able to survive this test. Just as Jesus promised, if we "save" our own life we will lose it. There is absolutely no possibility for it to survive and enter into the new creation.

## BREAKING TODAY'S SABBATH

You see, breaking today's Sabbath rest will also result in severe judgment, just as breaking the Old Testament Sabbath did. But this judgment is yet in the future.

When we fail to enter into God's rest, ie. ceasing from our own living, there will be future, inescapable consequences. We will suffer irrecoverable loss of our own soul. It will be consumed by His burning presence.

Perhaps some will argue against these foregoing assertions by "claiming the blood of Jesus." Perhaps they will insist that since we are forgiven, there can be no further consequences. What these dear brothers and sisters fail to understand is the purpose of forgiveness.

It is not to preserve the old man. God's eternal purpose is to fill us with His life and nature. Our Father forgives us so that He can give us His new life. And it is His plan that this new life should fill and dominate us completely. Forgiveness was not given to let the old sinful man off the hook.

Instead it was to open up the way for us to have intimate fellowship with God. It is through such fellowship that He provides a way of escape, so that we can be free from self and sin today and avoid judgment tomorrow.

With all this in mind, let us return again to our discussion of the Sabbath rest. In the heart and mind of God, this rest is an extremely important issue. The end of ourselves and the exchange of our life for His is a very sobering matter with eternal consequences.

Hebrews 4:1 reads: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it." Here we learn that, indeed, there is something to "fear." This fear is exactly what we have been speaking about.

The experience of ceasing to live for ourselves and by our own life is not just something for "advanced" or "spiritual" Christians. God's expectation is that all of us would experience the Sabbath rest.

This "rest" is so total, so complete, that it resembles death. When a person is no longer speaking their own words or seeking their own pleasure, they must be dead. This is actually what the New Testament Sabbath means. It is rest so

complete that it means the end of ourselves. It signifies the death of our old "soul life." Interestingly, when a person has died and is buried, we say that they were "laid to rest."

Just as with the other commandments, the Sabbath commandment has also been elevated by Jesus. No longer is it sufficient simply to stop working a little on one day every week. Today, there is no room for "self" at all. We too must be "laid to rest."

It is only by experiencing this death that we can know what the word resurrection means. It is only through the cross that we can genuinely walk in "newness of life" (Rm 6:4) being filled to overflowing with the life and nature of Jesus Christ.

But what about you? Are you using your time prudently to enter into all that God has purchased for you? Are you, as a wise and faithful servant, experiencing the true rest of God every day? Are you growing up into the full salvation of Jesus Christ? Or are you taking advantage of God's goodness and grace?

Are you simply living for yourself and by your own life, seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own words? Is the blood of Jesus precious to you or do you imagine it to be some easy way to escape the punishment you deserve for the lifestyle you are living?

I believe it was Jim Elliot who once said: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." What we cannot keep is our old, natural life. What we cannot lose is God's divine life with which we want to fill us.

Dear friends and brothers, let us all take a moment and examine our hearts seriously. Someday soon we will appear before His judgment seat. Wise and faithful servants will make themselves ready for His coming.

## 8.

# THE SWORD AND THE KINGDOM

The following message is taken from the experience of a very zealous disciple. His primary objective was to do the will of God and he pursued this goal with all of his might. This man was a follower of a teacher named Jesus who journeyed throughout the land proclaiming good news about the kingdom of God. His message was that this kingdom was near at hand.

In fact, this Jesus had let it be known to His intimate associates that He was God's anointed vessel to establish this heavenly kingdom on the earth. Not only this but it was also understood by those who followed Him that His close companions were under consideration for positions of leadership and authority in this kingdom which was to be set up. All this fueled the fire within our zealous brother to see that his leader's will was carried out and that others would both understand His program and also come into line with it.

What a picture had been painted for him – both from the Old Testament and also from Jesus' teachings – of what this wonderful kingdom was to be like. Peace would reign on the earth. The enemies of Israel – God's enemies – would be subdued. All forms of unrighteousness would be eliminated. Justice, truth and humility would supersede tyranny, lying and pride. All kinds of social evils including poverty, famine and oppression would be cleared up by God's personally chosen representative.

Even the course of nature would be changed so that wild animals would no longer eat each other and poisonous snakes would become harmless. Just imagine such a world where tranquility and harmony between men, nature and their God prevailed. It truly sounds like Paradise.

So you can well understand our brother's enthusiasm for this project. Here, under the leadership of this miracle working teacher, the prospect of an idyllic, righteous, God-centered, world-encompassing kingdom seemed just within his grasp. What an opportunity!

However, somewhere along the line, things seemed to be going wrong. The huge crowds that at one time had followed Jesus appeared to be melting away. Their excitement waned when He did not accept their crown or undertake to feed them perpetually. Not only this but the religious leaders were becoming increasingly restive and even downright hostile.

Rumors were even circulating that they were trying to have Jesus killed. And the Teacher him-

self did not seem to be seizing the opportunities which came along to gather an army or confront the Romans with force. Lately He had begun to talk very strangely about being crucified and other equally unintelligible things.

This brother knew that Jesus had supernatural power. He had seen it demonstrated many times before. There was no doubt that He was anointed and chosen by God – a man like Moses, a man to lead God’s people.

Nothing short of audible voices from heaven had confirmed this fact. There could be no question that this was the right man to follow, but somehow things were not going according to the plan – at least not according to his plan.

So when the religious official’s representatives appeared in the garden along with a motley crowd of others, he had to do something. If Jesus wouldn’t defend Himself, then he would just have to do it for Him. Common sense told him that much. He could not simply stand there and watch all that Jesus came to do ended without a fight. In order to see the dream which had been instilled in his heart brought to fruition, this opposition had to be eliminated.

Without a doubt, God’s will had always been accomplished through men of courage and determination. Surely Jesus must be waiting for His followers to take some action and use the resources at their disposal to see that God’s heavenly order was established. So..., with some such thoughts circulating through his mind, our brother Peter drew out his sword and cut off the High

Priest's servant's ear. Peter had effected a great and mighty deliverance.

Jesus' reaction to this was startling. Instead of jumping into the fray or encouraging the others to do so, He quietly instructed Peter to put his sword away. And then, as if to further emphasize His point, He healed the servant's ear.

The effect of this combined with all that followed – the night of trial, the angry crowds, and then the crucifixion of his leader – must have been devastating to our brother. All his dreams were shattered.

Evidently God did not mean to do what Jesus had been talking about. All this talk of idyllic kingdoms, social justice, righteousness – all had been for nothing. How could this have happened? How could the Almighty God have allowed evil to prevail and His Anointed to fail?

It seemed so obvious what needed to be done and what should have been done, yet Jesus appeared to be oblivious to it. Sometimes He seemed to be living in another world entirely. I imagine that the misery and depression which settled into Peter's heart as he meditated on these things must have been crushing.

## **AN IMPORTANT LESSON**

But through all this, our Lord was making for Peter and all the rest of us a very significant point. It is a lesson of extreme importance about which no Christian should be ignorant. In fact, it is my prayer that through this writing, this lesson could

impact our lives and thinking as forcefully as it did our brother Peter's.

The key to understanding the way in which God is working – the explanation for why Jesus behaved the way He did – is found in His simple answer to Pontius Pilate. Please pay careful attention to this. He said: "My kingdom is not of this world". He goes on to explain that if His kingdom were of this world that His servants would fight, as Peter attempted to do, to establish and maintain it.

However, "now" He said, "Now My kingdom is not from here" (Jn 18:36). Nothing could be plainer. Although Jesus had been preaching and teaching about a heavenly kingdom which was to appear upon this earth "now" was not the time for it.

Naturally this gives rise to a very important question. It is: "When is the time for this kingdom?" This question is crucial because, depending upon the answer to it, our activities as followers of Jesus Christ would be very different.

If, on the one hand His kingdom is now here, then according to the unmistakable words of Jesus in John 18:36, we should be doing everything within our power to establish a righteous order on this planet.

This would include such things as voting, marching, protesting, organizing, running for election to public offices and even the use of force to bring about what Jesus manifestly taught. Just as the Children of Israel used every means at their disposal to conquer the land of Canaan, so we too

would be required to do our utmost to bring about what we know God's will to be. But if on the other hand, "now" is not the time for His kingdom to come in this way, then an entirely different set of activities might be in order.

In view of this it seems important for us to discover from the scriptures exactly what God's timetable is. Just as with our brother Peter, it would not only be embarrassing but futile, and possibly even destructive, for us to be caught trying to do something which God was not doing.

To answer this question, we need only to look around us and see if the signs of this idyllic, heavenly kingdom as revealed to us in the word of God are evident in the world. To begin we might inquire if we see Jesus reigning physically upon the earth from the city Jerusalem as required by Is 24:23, Mic 4:7 and Rev 11:15 as well as many other scriptures. Next we might ask whether we are reigning with Him (Rev 20:4; 5:10, II Tim 2:12).

Then we would look for the twelve Apostles sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). Surely if this were the kingdom about which Christ spoke we would find ourselves feasting with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mt 8:11).

Additionally, all wars would have ceased (Is 2:4), carnivorous animals would now be herbivorous (Is 11:7), serpents would eat dust (Is 65:25), thorns and briars would no longer grow (Is 55:13), premature death would be a thing of the past (Is 65:20) and our enemy Satan would be bound helpless in the pit (Rev 20:2).

Not only this but all the nations would be obedient to the will of God and righteousness would reign everywhere (Is 32:1). (It should be understood here that these are just a small representative sample of the many manifestations of the kingdom given to us in the Bible.) If all this and much more describes the world in which you live, then we (or at least you) are living in the days of this heavenly kingdom.

Ah, but some will say, "God is depending upon us to carry these things out and establish such a kingdom. How can we stand still while we see injustice, poverty, abortion, pornography and other such things all about us? We can't just sit around and wait for God to do something. It'll never happen that way. After we (with God's help of course) set things right, then Jesus can return and clean up any loose ends. We will have prepared things for Him."

Poor brother Peter, he didn't understand God's plan either. He was not able until later to fathom the depths of the Divine design. It was only after all his own efforts had failed that he was ready to learn how to carry out the will of God in this age. However, the encouraging thing is that this brother became one of the chief workers towards establishing Jesus' invisible, present kingdom. Once he found out how, he became an effective instrument in God's hand.

I believe that any honest seeker of God, who has no position to defend, will agree that we do not see God's kingdom of righteousness here today. The only conclusion to which we can truth-

fully come is that Jesus' "now" is still in effect. "Now" His kingdom is not yet here. It is something we are looking for someday.

Since this is so, it behooves us for our own sake as well as for His, to look a little further into God's word to see if we can discover exactly where we are in His plan and how we should be conducting ourselves. If we are to be faithful, productive servants, we must both understand and then work in harmony with the plans of our Leader.

## GOD'S PRESENT KINGDOM

With this in mind I would like to state as clearly as possible what I believe to be a Divine principle which will serve to guide us in our understanding of God's work. It is this: God's present work in our world is going on within and is centered upon the hearts of men. Today, His is not an outward kingdom. It does not come with "observation" (Lk 17:20).

It is a secret, invisible work going on within the inward parts of men and women everywhere. These "earthen vessels" are undergoing a hidden, supernatural change which, although it does have its evidence in the physical world, is not really of this world.

The kingdom or the rulership of God is right now being established, not on this planet, but in the hearts of men. This point should be abundantly evident to anyone who reads and seeks to understand the scriptures.

Now why is God doing things in this way? One explanation could be that He has begun working in the most difficult area first. The course of nature can be changed in a moment. Nations can be subdued in a few days. Oh, but the wicked, deceitful, rebellious heart of man! What a problem it is to God and His eternal plans.

If Jesus is going to subjugate the earth to the will of God, He must first conquer the hearts of men and women. Someday soon our Lord is returning to establish His kingdom here. This is part of what He taught us to pray for. But in order to do so, He desires to have a large contingent of followers to aid Him in this task. It goes without saying that no one can set up any kind of effective administration unless he has qualified people to fill the positions available.

In the same way, Jesus cannot fill the positions of responsibility in His coming kingdom with those whose hearts are not fully submitted to Him. He cannot subdue the rebellious earth with other rebels as His representatives.

First of all, before He can proceed with His plan, He must have a good number of followers upon whom He can rely completely. When these are fully ready, then He can come back and establish His authority over all the earth.

The foregoing understanding should be of great value to us in ascertaining what our present task is as followers of Jesus. Since He is now working with men on the inside, we as His co-laborers, must work in this area also. This should be our point of focus and concentration. Our

responsibility is to help prepare our hearts along with the hearts of many others for His soon return.

But some may ask: "Shouldn't we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick and other such things? Aren't we responsible for making our society fit to live in?" My answer to such questions would be this: We are not free to make our own choices in this matter. It is not our responsibility to pick out some social ills or other needs which strike our fancy and then try to meet them in the name of Jesus.

The Bible makes it very clear that there are many works which are considered, both by the world and the Church, to be very good that will be rejected by Jesus on judgment day (Mt 7:22,23). We are taught in II Corinthians 10:4 that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are not earthly.

Today God's kingdom is spiritual and we must be doing spiritual work to be truly involved in it. Worldly methods and fleshly energy can do nothing to promote the interests of God. Furthermore, such efforts will one day be exposed as self-motivated and futile.

## **THE LESSON OF CHURCH HISTORY**

Church history is full of examples of such unauthorized activity. How many of those who have gone before us have been tempted to take the matters of the kingdom into their own hands. Several of those whose names today are revered

by the Christian Church, employed armies to murder other believers whose doctrine was contrary to theirs.

Masses of the “faithful” marched again and again to the “Holy Land” to free it from the infidels. In the United States some years ago many believers spent volumes of energy to make drinking alcohol illegal. They marched, protested and rallied. Many preachers and evangelists joined the fray. At one point, their efforts to establish a superficial righteousness seemed to work. Laws were enacted. The consumption of alcohol was forbidden.

Yet, this “success” did not last. The hearts of men and women had not been changed. So, after a few short years, these laws were repealed. All this fleshly effort in the name of Jesus was in vain.

More recently thousands of people expended countless hours and put forth untold effort in order to force one chain of stores to quit selling pornography. Perhaps even more resources have been employed attempting to stop abortion. All this and much, much more has been and is being done by well-meaning Christians who imagine that they are serving God – just like Peter.

I think it will be worth our while to examine the outcome of the above mentioned examples. It is possible that many of my readers may be unsure that such things are not God’s will. But let us look to see if God’s purposes have been furthered by them.

How many hearts were changed by the armies of the Church? How many infidels were

converted to Christianity? During the Prohibition days, how many turned to Christ as a result of the legislation against alcohol? How much less pornography is now in the world as a result of the 7-11 stores' decision not to sell it? Have the hearts of multitudes of men been changed?

How about the anti-abortion efforts. Has the moral fiber of the country been altered? Have people turned en masse toward God? Has revival broken out? I think not. These results speak for themselves. Fleshly, earthly efforts to bring about righteousness and the Kingdom of God are doomed to fail.

I do not mean to focus on these particular items as examples of spiritual impotency. They are only mentioned as representative samples of the countless endeavors engaged in by well-meaning believers which have not furthered the expansion of the kingdom of God. They have been a complete waste of time. Even worse, they have been done in rebellion against God.

I'm sure that some will point out that a few people were brought to Christ by those picketing outside the convenience stores and that some unwed mothers were saved from one particular sin or even a few saved themselves.

Yet these facts only serve to support my point. If all the effort expended in the above mentioned projects would have been directed towards changing men's hearts instead of laws or outward situations, how much more lasting, spiritual results would there have been? What would have happened if all the man-hours of picketing would

have been spent in prayer or in door to door witnessing? What would the effect on the world and the church have been if the Christians working towards anti-abortion legislation had instead devoted themselves to reaching the over 2 billion people who have never heard the gospel once? How much more could have been done to further God's purposes if only these believers were laboring according to His plan?

There is no doubt that genuine, powerful revivals have often brought about changes in the laws and activities of societies. Church history also gives us ample evidence of this.

However, it should be equally plain that changes in legislation and/or social climate have *never* precipitated a revival. It has never happened the other way around. It is only as the hearts of men are changed that any meaningful changes take place in their society. It is only when repentance from sin is central to the work, that God's purposes are really furthered.

While it is lawful for us to use the fashion of this world to work for God, we are warned not to abuse it. No alteration of the superficial situation in our country or locality will be of any eternal value. Well-fed people can still end up in the lake of fire. Mothers saved from murdering their unborn children will be there too if they are not converted. Alcoholics who have not touched a drop in years can still be unregenerated.

I'm sure this point is unmistakable: If we do not reach inside the hearts of those whom we are laboring to help, then we have not given them

anything worthwhile. Worse still is the fact that we have been squandering precious time which God wants to use for His kingdom.

I realize that the “needs” of the world can tug strongly on the strings of our all-too-human hearts. When we learn of the suffering of famine victims or read about the millions of unborn babies being slaughtered in almost every country around the globe, these things can provoke us to want to do something about it. Just like Peter, our natural man feels compelled to react to these apparent needs. We feel as if we simply cannot ignore these needs.

Quite often, this tendency is promoted by some preacher or article which tries to draw us into an involvement (usually financial) in some particular effort.

However, we must seek the face of God until we become motivated primarily, as Jesus was, by the deepest of human needs – the need of the heart to be filled with God. We must obey His command, put away our “swords” and work according to His plan.

## **GOD'S SOLUTION**

Our Lord did not ignore outward suffering. We have ample evidence of this throughout the four Gospels. But His primary purpose in the miracles which He performed was to point men to the answer to their deeper spiritual needs.

His ultimate mission was not to feed, heal and deliver the world physically. He realized only too

well that these were temporary solutions to a much greater problem.

His reason for coming was to save the world from the horrible plague of sin – the root cause of all human problems – and lead men back to God.

When understood correctly, every outward sign which Jesus did becomes a graphic picture of some kind of inner human need which He desires to meet in us. Blindness, disease, crippling infirmities and even death all have their parallels within the human breast. Jesus came to change hearts and change them in such a radical, eternal way that, in time, even the world would be impacted by it.

I am not in this writing trying to discourage Christians from being involved in the world around them. Exactly the opposite is true. There is more work than ever to be done today in the harvest fields. Meeting physical needs, for example distributing food and clothing can be a powerful vehicle through which to preach the good news.

Christians are instructed to maintain good works (Tit 3:8). Galatians 6:10 teaches us to "...do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." However, I am concerned that we do not become entangled in worldly work. Ours is a spiritual message. Ours is a heavenly goal.

We should only spend our time, money and energies on endeavors which promote God's heavenly kingdom. While the sufferings of this life may provide for us an opportunity to serve others and bring them to Jesus, we must never

lose sight of God's objective – to prepare the hearts of men for His soon return.

Please remember, it is often much easier for the flesh to do outward, worldly “good deeds” than to engage in truly spiritual activity. How many believers today are trying to salve their consciences by becoming involved in “church work,” social reform or other religious projects while all the time their hearts are not really submitted to Jesus. Even unbelievers can sometimes change outward circumstances through their fleshly means.

But God's real kingdom work today is neither outward or fleshly. Truly spiritual work is something much different. It requires that those doing it have an intimate relationship with God. It demands relinquishing control of our lives to Him. It involves all of those things about which Jesus was teaching but which Peter didn't understand.

Experiencing the cross, self-denial, not seeking worldly influence or power – these are the kinds of hidden things which God is using today to build His kingdom. Such experiences are indispensable if we are to have true heart changing, kingdom-producing power.

It may be that some of my readers will be offended by what I have been saying. It is possible that this word has touched the situations of a few. The truth is that this message has been on my heart for years but I have put off writing it because I knew that it might be controversial and offensive.

But, dear brothers and sisters, please do not be put off by these things but take them to the Lord in prayer. Please regard them as the admonition of a friend who has your best interest at heart.

If I am wrong to insist upon putting the hearts of men first as I believe God is doing, I pray that He will show me. On the other hand, if you are wasting His time and even rebelling against Him, only you will bear the consequences.

My dear friends, please remember that in all these things, God must be preeminent. He is in charge and it is His will we must be doing.

Therefore, let us put away our fleshly swords and follow Him, doing His work in His way. We have His assurance that one day soon He will return and set right the many things that so grieve us in our world.



## 9.

### THREE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

This message is designed to put forth three basic truths concerning the church. Therefore, it seems expedient to begin with a discussion of exactly what we mean when we use the word "church."

Most Christians would probably define church as "the body of Christ." By this they mean that the church is not a building but rather consists of people. While it is true that the church is "the body of Christ" and that it is made up of men and women rather than bricks and mortar, even this concept falls short of the Biblical meaning conveyed by the word. Consequently, as it is with so many other spiritual truths, our experience of the church has often been severely limited by our revelation concerning it.

In an attempt to overcome this problem and to start afresh in our search for a deeper understanding of this subject, let us define church in this way:

“The church is a spiritual reality.” The church is a spiritual reality and this reality should be our experience! Just what does this author mean by “a spiritual reality?” We will take some time here and try to make this subject more clear.

When the Bible uses the word “church” it is referring to much more than a number of believers gathered together in one place. While it is true that the church does consist of two or more individuals, still the fact remains that simply getting a few Christians together does not constitute the church.

Believers might meet together for many different reasons. They may gather for the sake of entertainment, they might meet to enjoy each others’ company, they may even congregate to hear inspiring preaching and wonderful singing.

But unless these people are actually experiencing the reality of the body of Christ, what they are doing does not qualify as being “church.” The fact that many readers will probably not understand what I mean here only serves to underline the scope and severity of the problem at hand.

The church experience happens when Christians come together and the presence of Jesus Christ is manifested in their midst. The church experience occurs when two or more believers enter into the Spirit together. The church experience is realized when men and women are raised up and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). The church experience consists of God ministering Himself to and through every member of His body. The church experi-

ence is known when God Himself is present among His people.

Such meetings are not meant to be a rare or even nonexistent happening. In the early church, these things appear to have been taken for granted. Genuine spiritual gatherings like this are essential if we are to have what the New Testament calls "church." If these things are not your experience, then I would urge you to take a prolonged, serious, prayerful look at what you are doing which you have thought to be "church."

In this world the church is not an end in itself but only the means to an end. It is precisely at this point that many people make a serious mistake. They often suppose that if their "church" is successful from an earthly standpoint (having crowded meetings, good preaching, a new building etc.) that God is pleased with their efforts.

However, God's pleasure can only be gained when we are accomplishing His purposes. To the extent that what we are doing fulfills His desires, it is approved. To the degree that our activities fail in this area, they are completely useless and are a waste of time.

What then is God's purpose for the church? What is the end He has in view? It is twofold. Firstly, it is to change human beings into His likeness and secondly, to evangelize a perishing world. The spiritual experience of church which we have been describing is the Divinely instituted vehicle to accomplish both of these purposes.

The fact that we see so many other methodologies being employed to achieve the same

results is simply a further testimony to how far our church experience has fallen from God's original intention.

Concerning the first purpose, the genuine spiritual experience of the body of Christ is the best environment for spiritual growth. God has designed this context as the one which will be the most helpful to us as we grow to maturity. The presence of Jesus being manifested among us as we meet together will truly change our lives.

As He moves within His church, ministering Himself to and through each one, the body is built up properly. It is the supply of "every joint" which "causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16).

This life flow between the members is of purely heavenly origin. Natural, human efforts can never achieve the required results. Therefore, such true, spiritual "church" is essential if the job is to be done effectively.

As for the second objective, such an environment is also the best place for evangelism. When believers actually have the presence of God in their midst, when they genuinely enter into the Spirit, when each one has the opportunity to "prophesy," then unbelievers are easily convinced of God's reality (I Cor 14:24,25).

Such an experience puts the gospel beyond the realm of intellectual argument. It can no longer be regarded simply as a fairy tale or theory. Its reality is viewable in the lives of those in the church. What I am advocating here is not a hopeful suggestion. This is something which myself

and many others have experienced. It is a reality which is for all of God's people.

With all these things in mind, it seems important to take a little time here and look at three essential principles which, if followed, will go a long way towards producing a true church experience.

Since this subject is so crucial and its impact – both upon ourselves and the unbelieving world – is so profound, it stands to reason that we should carefully and seriously examine how we can more closely approach God's intention. As we do so I beg you, open your heart and your mind to God and allow Him to speak to you through these things. There is no doubt that the truths which we are discussing here have eternal consequences.

## **PRINCIPLE NUMBER ONE – LIFE**

In order for any body to function it must be living. The members of the body of Jesus Christ therefore must be full of life. This implies several things. Firstly, the people who are considered to be part of church must be born of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5). They must be real Christians.

When Jesus came, He manifested God's own life to man (I Jn 1:1). After His resurrection from the grave and His ascension to the right hand of the Father, He poured out the Holy "Spirit of life" (Rm 8:2) into all who believe in His name. If anyone does not have the Holy Spirit within them, they are not a true believer. It is only by the Holy Spirit that anyone can receive God's life.

Secondly, every church member should know what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is God's will for every Christian to be filled to overflowing with His Spirit. He desires this for us as much as an earthly father wants to feed his own children (Lk 11:11-13).

This is not an experience for a select few. It is the normal, Biblical standard. In fact, we are commanded to be so filled (Eph 5:18). I do not intend here to get involved in a controversy over "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Neither do I wish to discuss how this "filling" might be manifested.

I only present the following two facts which should be self-evident. Number one, it is God's intention to fill every believer with the Holy Spirit. And number two, it is impossible to be filled with the Spirit of the Most High God and not know it.

Therefore, if your life is devoid of the Spirit, either you have not been truly converted or you have not opened your life sufficiently to God to enjoy what He has for you. If this is your situation, I urge you to humble yourself before Him and seek His face until you know that you are experiencing all that Jesus came to give.

Thirdly, every Christian should be continually refilled with the Holy Spirit. This should be our daily, hourly, every minute – in fact our constant – experience. We should walk and live in the Spirit (Gal 5:25).

Far too many believers are resting their relationship with Jesus on something which happened to them many years ago.

Our past experiences may be very good but they will not support us today. Yesterday's manna will not feed anyone. For our church experience to be truly living, it is absolutely essential that each of the members fill themselves daily with God's life. This means being continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

In order for this to be accomplished, each and every believer must cultivate an intimate, daily, association with Jesus Christ. We can do this by meditating in His word and by praying in the Holy Spirit. Just as we require food each day to live normally, so every Christian should spend adequate time daily communicating with God.

It is not sufficient just to shoot up a quick prayer now and then. Neither is it good enough simply to sit back and get your nourishment from the ministry of others. No one else can carry you along spiritually. You must apply yourself and diligently seek God on your own. Each one of us should set aside a good, long, undisturbed time every day to commune with Him and enjoy Him. In this way we will be full of His life.

As you can imagine, the experience of each individual will affect all of the others. When each of the members applies himself to be filled with God, the whole church is benefitted. When everyone partakes of this eternal substance and shares it with the rest during their times of fellowship, the church experience of all is enhanced.

Conversely, when the lives of the individual members are lacking, the whole assembly is adversely affected. All too often the solution to

this problem has been to prop up the church with programs, new leadership or other outward things. God's remedy on the other hand is for each one to repent of their deadness and return again to a living relationship with Himself.

## **PRINCIPLE NUMBER TWO – UNITY**

The second principle about which we will speak is that of unity. Again we will begin with the analogy of a human body. If you take a person and cut him into many pieces, this destroys his life. The same is true of Christ's body. Unity is absolutely essential.

Since this is such a vast subject and it is fraught with many difficult considerations, we will for the sake of convenience, break it down into two categories: unity between Christians who meet together and, unity among different meetings of the Church as a whole.

Let us begin our discussion of the first category by stating that unity is not optional. It is God's commandment. We are commanded by God to love others as much as we love ourselves. Such love is only made possible by an intimate relationship with God.

Since God's love for the entire world and individuals in particular is tremendous, as we are in touch with Him, He will supply us to love others. Love is the substance of true unity. While many groups may have uniformity, conformity or even unanimity, only love provides the reality which we are seeking here.

True unity expressed in brotherly love will manifest itself in several ways. Those who have it will be continually seeking to serve others. They will pray for others, build others up in the faith, look for opportunities to help others financially and practically, spend time fellowshiping with others and in general manifest the love which the Father has for them. Such activity will be their daily exercise.

Also such loving people will never be quick to say anything bad about someone else, especially one of their brothers or sisters in Christ. It does not take much imagination to see how greatly our church experience would be elevated if every member practiced this kind of behavior. Church, real church, is made up of this sort of life style. Nothing else qualifies.

Unfortunately, genuine love does not come easily. The fallen nature within man fights against it. Since the opposition to such unity from both within and without is tremendous, this kind of experience must begin with a commitment. It will be necessary for each member of the body to come to a conscious, deliberate decision to love and serve the others unconditionally.

This is absolutely essential! If we leave love only as an option or if we allow our feelings to govern us, the devil will do his work, the flesh will prevail and the church will be damaged.

Therefore, we must make a firm decision to love each other and never allow anything to change it. Once this decision is made, we will find the supernatural supply of God enabling us to fol-

low through with our commitment. In this way, we will begin to experience more of the fullness of Christ in the church.

This then brings us to our second category under consideration which is unity among different church meetings. Here again the answer is brotherly love. To have success in this area we must first be brought by God to see the Church from His point of view.

No doubt as Jesus looks down upon the many different "churches," denominations and sects, He recognizes those who are His own within them. Although He certainly is aware of these divisions and I'm sure that they must grieve His heart, still He sees the members of His one body among them (Eph 4:4). While man's earthbound vision may be clouded by the proliferation of various Christian groups, Christ from His heavenly vantage point, sees His people – His Church.

Therefore, if we can be brought by God to view His Church the way He sees it, we will no longer be limited by any schisms in the Body. Our love should transcend any man-made separations. Although in this life we will probably never see an end to all the divisions, we can end them in our own hearts.

The more Christians who take this position of love towards all, the better the situation will become. I am not suggesting that we should go and join ourselves to groups with which we cannot agree. I am only advocating that we love "with a pure heart fervently" those true believers who are in them (I Pet 1:22).

As we have been seeing, the church is not a place or a group but a spiritual reality which we can experience. Such an experience can penetrate any outward barriers. We can have true spiritual relationships and fellowship with believers in all kinds of situations. This is the only real church.

### THE THIRD PRINCIPLE – HEADSHIP

The third principle I would like to mention here is the headship of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Paul the apostle warns us about some believers who were “not holding the head” (Col 2:19).

What does this mean? Very simply it indicates that Jesus Christ was not the primary authority in every aspect of their church experience. In our present context it would mean that we have elevated other things (this could include leaders, rituals, doctrines, methods, traditions etc.) to a place which they should not occupy.

The Bible teaches us that God has given Jesus Christ to be “...head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22,23). This word “all” has a very special significance. It means everything!

In another place we read that in *all* things He is to have the pre-eminence (Col 1:18). Every believer should take this point seriously. Christians must be extremely careful never to displace or nullify Jesus’ authority. This is not an insignificant consideration. This concept is crucial for a genuine church experience. The body of

Jesus Christ can no more function properly when His authority is replaced or limited than a human being can who is paralyzed or decapitated.

I can think of no other truth that has been more neglected and abused in our modern "churches." I am afraid that if Jesus asserted His rightful authority over many Christian assemblies today, almost every "table" would be overturned.

A discussion of the headship of Christ over His body will of necessity involve two different aspects: His authority over each individual believer and, His leadership of the church meetings. To simplify our investigation, we will consider each of these items separately.

To begin, Jesus must be Lord of every Christian. This means that He is to have full control over every aspect of their lives. No area of living should be withheld from Him.

Since in this age, Jesus is not forcibly asserting His authority, we must be willing to let Him reign over us. The only proper position for a believer to be in is one of full submission to the Holy Spirit. When this element is lacking or not completely understood by those with whom we are meeting, our church experience will suffer proportionately.

Serious problems can also be caused by unscriptural human authority. When Christians begin to rely too much on a man or group of men for guidance, their relationship with their true Head is damaged. While we should all be open to receive fellowship, direction and advice from others (especially those who are more mature), if we become dependent upon them or if we follow

them instead of our Lord, we are in serious spiritual danger (Jer 17:5).

God's authority flows from the Head to His body. Those who are intimate with Him are often used as channels of this authority. However, no one ever becomes that authority themselves. It does not matter how frequently or how powerfully some member may be used. He or she never gets to be *the* authority or have their own authority. That position is eternally reserved for the Head.

Therefore, while it is important to be sensitive to the voice of God speaking through others, it is essential that no human being ever takes His rightful place in our lives.

Another difficulty which I fear is very common is that the structure of many Christian groups does not allow for diversity among the individual members. Many times believers are permitted to function only in ways which fit in with the predetermined pattern or format. Perhaps this situation exists because people feel more secure with such uniformity.

However this kind of behavior greatly restricts the authority of Jesus. The result is paralysis and inactivity among the members of His body.

How many Christians are now pursuing things of this world because they have not been allowed to find spiritual fulfillment in the church! How many groups are filled with overfed, yet immature believers who have never learned how to serve others! This sad situation cannot be

blamed wholly upon these individuals. All too often such people have been greatly hindered by an earthly, inflexible organization they consider to be the "church."

## CHURCH MEETINGS

These same truths also apply to our church meetings. Jesus wants to lead us in everything we do. When He comes into our midst, He comes as our High Priest to lead us in our worship. If His authority to do so is limited this will dramatically affect the spiritual reality of our gatherings.

Some of the things which can hinder or confine the leadership of our Lord are: preplanned meetings, "platform led" services, religious formalities and the domination of the group by the ministry of one individual. All these things are extremely common in the Church today. Yet all of them serve only to restrict the authority of the Head and stifle our church experience.

Unfortunately many Christians do not realize that Jesus actually could lead church meetings. It may be that the idea has never occurred to them. Possibly some are unsure that such an important task could be done by someone who is... uh, well, invisible. Unfortunately many seem to think it safer to organize something or let someone "qualified" do the leading.

That fact is that Jesus Christ is infinitely capable of directing the meetings of His church. In many cases, we simply haven't given Him the opportunity. Another possibility is that "we" col-

lectively have so little real intimacy with Him that we are unable to sense His authority and are therefore unable to follow His leading in our gatherings.

A scriptural church meeting is run by the Holy Spirit and provides the opportunity for every member to function. In I Corinthians 14:26 we read that when the church comes together each one can have a psalm, teaching, tongue, revelation or interpretation.

Ephesians 4:16 teaches that it is from the life supply of every part that the body is built up. During a proper church gathering, the Holy Spirit moves among His people and prompts each one to minister their portion of God to the others. In this way every need can be met.

If only the talented ones function, it will greatly limit our experience. On the other hand, when all have the opportunity to share, we can enjoy tremendous fullness.

While some may think that I am speaking against the ministry of gifted men, I am not. However, much of the ministry currently done in church meetings, such as extensive preaching and teaching, probably ought to take place somewhere else. Separate times and places can easily be arranged for such purposes.

Although there certainly is room for preaching and teaching in the church, it should be kept in check so that it does not crowd out the portion of others. (Please read I Cor 14:30,31).

No individual should dominate the assembly with his or her ministry. Paul the apostle did his

teaching in the synagogue, in a school, in his own hired house and elsewhere (Acts 19:8,9; 28:30,31).

There is no indication that he took up the majority of every meeting with his messages. His preaching at Troas, which evidently lasted all night, should be understood as an exception created by circumstances. Since he was leaving the next day, he wanted to have as much time as possible to share with them (Acts 20:6-11).

Yes, the ministry of specially anointed individuals should be exercised, but only with due regard for the proper functioning of the regular church meetings.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion let me say that the church has strayed a long way from God's intention over the years. A brief comparison of today's situation with the church in the New Testament gives us ample evidence of this fact.

However, this does not mean that our goal of truly spiritual meetings is unattainable. I am confident that to the degree to which we practice the above principles our church experience will be greatly enhanced. Conversely, to the extent that we fail to implement these things we will be limited in our experience of God in our midst.

The church certainly is a spiritual reality. It is equally certain that we can and should be experiencing it as such. The ends which God has in view can only be achieved by His methods. Everything else, no matter how good it may appear from a

human point of view is only wood, hay and stubble.

Please remember that success from an earthly standpoint means nothing to God. Large numbers, eloquent preaching, dynamic entertainment and many other things so common among us today do not impress Him. Only that which He Himself initiates will stand the test on Judgement Day.

May God have mercy upon us that we could enter into true spiritual reality in our daily lives and in our church meetings.



## 10.

### LOVING GOD

Genuine love bespeaks commitment. The kind of love which God has for us, and the kind He wants us to have for Himself and others, involves a profound commitment. If we say that we love someone but are unwilling to make any kind of commitment to them, what we say is false.

What we actually mean when we say that we love someone without this commitment is merely that we desire them, that they appeal to us or that we want something from them. Love on the other hand – true love – involves a total commitment to another person.

Many say that they love someone else. But often what they actually mean is that they want to get enjoyment or pleasure from the other person. They expect to get some benefit from them. They hope that the other will give them satisfaction in a variety of ways. Their “love” is in reality the expectation of the fulfillment of their own selfish desires. Frequently, if and when this other person that they claim to “love” ceases to give them the

pleasure, service and feelings they expect, such shallow love disappears.

Such self-centered love is not genuine. Without commitment, when anyone ceases to please us, we simply discard them. When we don't get what we want, then the other becomes dispensable.

Many have this kleenex tissue kind of "love." Once they have used someone else for their own benefit and the other has ceased to be gratifying to them, they simply throw them away in the trash. This kind of self-centered love is an earthly, natural, human variety. It does not last through much difficulty and does not really satisfy the human heart. It is a vain illusion which many chase to their own hurt.

God's kind of love, on the other hand, is based on commitment. This fact is illustrated for us by His thoughts concerning marriage. In God's sight a marriage between a man and woman involves the making of a binding covenant (Mal 2:14).

Without this covenant, intimate relationships between men and women are forbidden and are considered to be sin. From our previous discussion, it becomes clear that "sin" is a very appropriate word to describe such selfish "love."

The only difference between fornication and the marriage act is that marriage includes a life commitment. It is God's plan that before two individuals take so much from each other and share themselves with each other so intimately, they must make a commitment – a deep, lifelong, bottom-of-the-heart commitment – to one another.

This means that they agree to love one another, to stick with one another through thick and thin and to serve one another in all situations. The marriage covenant is meant to be completely binding as long as both parties live. As we have seen, without such a commitment what we have is not real love at all but simply selfish desire.

So we have clearly elucidated for us here the fact that when God through His holy word speaks to us about the subject of love, He is not simply speaking about warm, cozy or even romantic feelings but about something which involves a commitment on our part to someone. Covenant is the underpinning of true love.

## THE LOVE OF GOD

The fact is that God has already made a deep, eternal commitment to those who believe in Him. This commitment of His is inalterable. His love is both deep and irrevocable.

Why is this important? Knowing that such a commitment exists on the part of God and that it is eternal, solid and without change, gives us security. When we know that we are loved in such a way, we can then open our heart. When we are sure that we are loved deeply and thoroughly by someone, when we know that this love will never disappear or change, then we have confidence to open up to that person. In God's case, we can trust that whatever He finds within us, He will treat with the utmost tenderness, care and understanding. God will not simply use us and discard us.

How good it is that our God's love is not like the earthly variety! How wonderful it is that His love is both profound and committed! How much every one of us needs to feel loved unconditionally by someone! The fact that God offers us such love is one of the most wonderful parts of the gospel message.

God demonstrated His love for us by sending His own Son to die on the cross for our sins. This act of His confirms that His is an unselfish, serving kind of love. It shows the depth of His commitment to those who believe. It reveals the lengths to which He is willing to go to put the interests of others ahead of His own comfort and enjoyment.

## **TRANSFORMING THE SOUL**

Our heavenly Father has a plan to do a profound, transforming work in our hearts. He desires to change us from what we are into all that He is. He wishes to free us from our darkness and sin, replacing our sinful nature with His pure holy one.

Yet, for this to occur, we must be open to Him. We must be surrendered. We must allow Him to do this work. Much of what must be altered in us involves sensitive, intimate parts of our soul. His healing hands may need to touch and change things which are painful and private. No doubt, He will need to expose in us things which are embarrassing and difficult – things which we don't like to see and hope that no one else knows about.

God will not force His way upon us. He will not push us to open up or to let Him do His work. Our Lord is extremely sensitive in this area not to violate our will in any way. He will go not one centimeter further with His work inside of us than we are willing for Him to go.

For this reason, knowing the love of God is essential. Realizing His commitment to us, His profound passion toward His people and His unchanging love will help us to open up completely to Him. Knowing this love, we can lay our lives bare before Him without barrier or resistance, allowing Him to do His transforming work.

Such yielding is essential. Such opening to God is the only way in which His work in us can progress without hindrance. Only when we are completely ready and willing for Him to touch, expose and tenderly change everything in us will we experience His transforming work. Such complete surrender of our inner man can only occur when we know that we are fully loved.

In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul prays for those who will believe. His heart's desire is that they would know the love of God in such a profound way that they could be considered to be "rooted and grounded" in it (vs 17).

This knowledge of divine love then becomes a basis for our relationship with Jesus. It opens the way for us to be: "...able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height [of God's person and plan]" (vs 18). The end result of knowing such an amazing love is almost unbelievable. It is so that we could be:

“...filled with all the fullness of God” (vs 19). Here is an amazing thing. It is God’s revealed will that we be filled with “all the fullness” of who and what He is.

Yet how is such a wonderful thing possible? It is only by being completely open and yielded to Him. This can come to us exclusively by knowing and being completely confident in His committed love for us.

## THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

With this understanding we will now examine a well-known verse. This passage speaks about our part in this wonderful, holy relationship. We read: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment” (Mr 12:30). The fact that God is commanding us concerning this love is a clear indication that this is what He is seeking.

As we have been seeing, if we are to fulfill God’s plan, it will not be enough for us just to have a few warm feelings towards Him. It will not be sufficient merely to have a little desire for Him, to appreciate things about Him, or even to enjoy His presence occasionally.

What God is asking of us here is a total, unre-served surrender of all that we are, everything we have and all that we possess, to Himself. This verse speaks of a complete yielding to God. It means that we offer ourselves to love Him, open to Him and serve Him, doing everything we can

to please Him. It also means that we realize that this is a binding, lifelong commitment.

It is possible for a person to seek God with another, human kind of love. Some seek Him for success and/or prosperity. Others are looking for healing, blessings and solutions for any number of other personal problems. Many look to God for what they can get from Him, with little attention to how they can actually reciprocate by loving Him in a way which will be of benefit to Him too.

It is conceivable that many in the church today see their relationship with God as a one way street. In their minds, they picture God doing all the giving and them all the receiving. Perhaps they imagine God as a sort of celestial dispenser of good things, but not as a living Person with whom they can have a love relationship.

This sad condition does little to change our souls. It impedes spiritual growth. It limits the work of God in our lives. Without seeing God's love and corresponding to it by yielding ourselves to Him and loving Him without barriers, we cannot make much progress in the spiritual life.

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were naked, yet they were not ashamed. When a person is naked, it means that there is nothing secret. Nothing is hidden or reserved. Interestingly, when God's celestial woman is revealed in Revelation chapter 12, she too appears to be virtually naked. We read that she is only "clothed with the sun" (vs 1).

But a celestial orb makes for very poor clothing. It cannot fit very well. What we can under-

stand here is that, instead of garments, she is clothed with glory, an intense bright shining which resembles the sun. This must be the glory of God. Confirming this, we read in Revelation 21:11 that the bride of Christ has “the glory of God.” This must be part of, or perhaps all of, her clothing.

What does this mean to us? Certainly neither we nor the scriptures are promoting nudism. But what we understand here is that in our relationship with God, there should be nothing secret, nothing hidden.

Between us and Him, there should be an openness and transparency of uninhibited love. We should have no emotional barriers or resistances. We don't need any “clothes” to hide ourselves from Him. Through our love relationship with Jesus, we can arrive at a holy intimacy with Him which allows Him to transform our lives.

## THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

As you probably already realize, the second commandment is similar to the first. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mr 12:31). In this matter also, if we are to be real Christians, this should be our experience. This commandment too involves a commitment – not a partial concern or passing interest – but a total, unreserved commitment of ourselves to our neighbor.

This verse, although it certainly does apply to everyone, has a very special application in our relationship with other Christians. If we are to live in harmony with God and the thoughts of His

heart, we must know a heartfelt, complete, life-long commitment to other men and women who are believers in Jesus Christ, just as He does.

Through Jesus, we have become members of the same body. We have all been bought with the same precious blood. We have been drawn by God into a relationship with others which we are able to nurture.

Every part of a human body has an integral life commitment and life relationship with the others. Without this the human body could not function properly. The same is true of the body of Christ on the earth today. We are instructed to have a commitment to other Christians in which we have determined that we will serve them with the life of God.

If we have this genuine love for the other members of Christ's body, our relationship with them will be as follows:

We will seek their good above our own (both financially and spiritually), we will spend time praying for their needs, we will be alert for ways in which we can help them (both practically and spiritually) and we will spend time with them. (This means seeing them more than once or twice a week from a distance in church meetings.) We will make every attempt to encourage them and look for opportunities to build them up – in short we will cultivate a body relationship with them which will allow God the opportunity to minister to them through us.

Additionally this infers that we will say nothing – absolutely nothing – about them which

would cause anyone else to think less of them or in any way diminish their love for them.

Obviously, this kind of love is not natural. It is not the normal response of the human heart. So, this love must have another source. It must come from God. And it does. When we are willing to enter into a love relationship with Him, we begin to experience His love for others also. The love that He has for the world can begin to fill our hearts too.

Our love for God and then our love for one another should be first and foremost in our lives. What we are talking about here is a love for other people – a commitment to others – that is going to change our lives. It is going to alter our priorities.

It is going to necessitate putting others first and “self” last just as Jesus did. It is going to put demands upon our time and energies that will interfere with our own plans and pleasures. It may sometimes make us uncomfortable. It, no doubt, will take us beyond our “comfort zones.”

However, these difficulties will only last until we realize through experience that God’s blessing is upon this way. We are going to find God while we serve others – as we gird on the towel and minister to their needs – in a way that we have never experienced Him before. We are going to discover what the word “blessing” really means.

## **A PROPER CHURCH EXPERIENCE**

Such love is the substance of the true church. It is an essential ingredient. Without it genuine

“church” really does not exist. It is all too possible to have a religious organization which is full of “good” Christians, wonderful programs and crowded meetings – something which everyone would call a “church” – that is almost devoid of the real thing. How often it is that believers relate to each other only superficially and sporadically.

When a human body is functioning normally, its members are intimately associated with each other. If this commitment breaks down, the life drains away. This same rule also applies to the church. To the extent that believers have a life covenant with one another, they actually express the body of Christ.

Conversely, to the degree that Christians fail in this area, they cease to experience the church in any practical way. While it is true that all God’s children are part of the church, if our experience of God’s love is missing, we are living in spiritual poverty. What a tragedy it is that so much of what passes for Christianity has strayed so far from God’s priorities!

The true expression of Christ’s church which we have been describing is the best environment for spiritual growth. While believers can and should grow individually, it is when all the members of the body are functioning in a love relationship with each other that the most spiritual progress can be made. In this situation all the needs of everyone, especially new converts, can be met satisfactorily.

Just as a family which is full of love is the best place to raise a child, so the church which prac-

tices love for one another is the ideal environment in which believers can grow to maturity.

Imagine for a moment the effect this sort of thing would have upon your walk with the Lord and also upon those with whom you are acquainted. It could not take long before real progress became evident.

This is not a “pie-in-the-sky” suggestion. It is God’s revealed intention for His church to function in precisely this way! These things are clearly taught throughout the whole New Testament. If our experience is anything less than this, we should fall on our faces before God and plead with Him to change us and those around us so that we can fulfill His will.

There is no doubt that this is God’s plan. There can be no mistaking the fact that this is exactly what Christ desires. How then can we proceed on without experiencing it? How can we continue to claim to be Christians, imagine that we have a relationship with the Lord or suppose that we are having any meaningful church experience while not living in God’s love for one another? The answer must be that we cannot.

I am not suggesting that we can practically enjoy this kind of relationship with every other Christian in the world. However there should be some – those whom God has pointed out to us – with whom and to whom He wants us to have a loving commitment. Just as bricks in the wall of a building are most intimately associated with the ones immediately around them, so it is in the Christian life.

Our commitment to a few will be something which we experience practically. Our commitment to those whose lives are more distant from ours will of necessity be somewhat less experiential. Nevertheless, it should still exist and should manifest itself whenever the opportunity arises. This fact is clearly demonstrated by the New Testament's teaching on showing hospitality to strangers (Rm 12:13, Heb 13:2).

### LOVE MUST BE GUIDED BY GOD

We must be warned here that this love which we express towards others, since it is from God, must also be guided *by* God. We cannot simply be led by human sympathy or feelings. Our "love" must not be motivated by merely human instincts. When we are speaking about a commitment to love, this is something which must not be guided by natural compassion, but by the Lord.

It is obvious that we are not able to meet every human need in the world. It is not even possible to meet those which we see around us every day. We must be led by God, not by human sentiment or necessity. Our love must be an expression of the leadership and authority of the Holy Spirit.

Not even Jesus tried to meet every need. An example of this is the beggar who God used Peter and John to heal. He sat at the entrance to the temple every day. It was his place to beg (Acts 3:10). It is probable that Jesus passed him there, perhaps several times. Yet the Father did not lead Him to cure this crippled man at that time.

If and when we try to help people without the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we will get into trouble. Sometimes, we will even suffer for it. For example, when we try to help someone whom God is disciplining, we can end up on the receiving end of a few blows from the Divine rod also. This is a warning I pass along which comes from many hard and painful experiences.

When our heart is submitted and willing, God will guide us in fulfilling His will by expressing His love both to the church and the perishing-world. It is essential to make a love commitment to others. But is also imperative that, as in all other Christian acts, we be led by the Holy Spirit. If we do not follow Jesus, being guided by Him in our quest to love, we will encounter many frustrations.

## OTHER COMMITMENTS

Please notice here that I am not speaking about commitment to a church, religious organization or group. The Bible nowhere teaches this sort of commitment. In fact, it protests against it (I Cor 1:12,13)! I am also not speaking here about commitment to leaders, to those "over you," or to some kind of hierarchical arrangement which some Christians advocate. Neither am I urging a slavish allegiance to some doctrinal position.

Such commitments, either to organizations, leaders or teachings are powerless to produce the result that God desires. It is all too easy for Christians to be "good church members," to be

loyal to some ministry or to be faithful to a particular revelation and still possess very little of this kind of love. A cursory examination of the situation in present-day Christendom should serve to graphically illustrate this point.

The great danger of these other commitments is that they are often substituted for the true love covenant about which we have been speaking. An example of this occurs when people think that because they have made a commitment to a certain church group, perhaps by "joining" or signing a membership agreement, that this is the extent of their obligation. In reality, their responsibility to God and to other believers is not even touched by this kind of activity.

The commitment which we are discussing here is much, much deeper than this. The results which can be achieved with group, leadership or doctrinal commitments and the "unity" which is brought about in this way is unfortunately outward and artificial.

While these commitments involve a devotion to things, God's way is commitment to people. Only that which results from a total love covenant one with another is either real or scriptural. Furthermore, it is only this kind of commitment that God commands.

A further difficulty which these extrabiblical commitments raise is that of divisiveness. This sin occurs when people's love for each other is affected by their group allegiances. How often we do not love, or even hate, those who disagree with us. How common this practice is today, yet noth-

ing could be more destructive and contrary to real love. Understandably, the scriptures soundly condemn such activity (I Cor 3:3ff).

## THE CHURCH REVOLUTIONIZED

Truly this is the great lack in the Christian Church today – brotherly love. If all believers had this deep commitment to one another, a love which involves a life covenant to serve all other Christians, regardless of their opinions, backgrounds or creeds, present-day Christianity would be revolutionized.

Many people today speak about unity among the churches in the body of Jesus Christ. But with such efforts the big question always is: How is such a thing going to come about? Should we just shake hands over our doctrinal fences? Should we produce some kind of world-wide organization in which we can exhibit an appearance of oneness while still maintaining our separations? Or should we get off in still another corner, rally around still another doctrinal position which will “guarantee” unity and insist that all others come and join us? I think not.

I believe the only hope we have for real unity is brotherly love. The only chance believers have to arrive at the place where God manifestly wants us to be, is to truly know His love for us and then with this love begin to “...love one another with a pure heart fervently” (I Pet 1:22).

This love about which we are speaking must transcend denominational barriers and bound-

aries. It must be a love which is heartfelt for everyone regardless of their disposition or affiliation. It cannot be selective but must be based upon the same criterion upon which God has received others.

We should love other believers for only one reason: the Father has loved them and chosen them to be His. There are no other options. Once God has saved someone by giving them His life, we are commanded to love that person. It is our Christian responsibility.

As we come before God and allow Him to fill our hearts with His love for all of His people, we will no longer recognize any separations in the body of Christ. We will be genuinely "discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor 11:29). If by some mighty act of God, all Christians could be given this viewpoint, the denominations and divisions, which are so familiar to us today, would cease to exist.

Love is the opposite of division. The sectarian situation in Christianity today is a shame to the Lord. It is a disgrace to His name and a blot upon His precious testimony. If we could be brought by God to repentance concerning this sin of not loving one another, the church would truly be revolutionized. Love is an unconquerable force that should bind believers together in these last days. May we seek God until we have it!

## **A TESTIMONY TO UNBELIEVERS**

Not only would love revolutionize the church, but it would also have a tremendous impact on

unbelievers. The testimony of Christianity would be sent forth with such power that it would be irresistible.

Jesus said: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). It is our love that will be a witness to the world. It is the fact that we have been so delivered from self and sin – the things which separate us today – which will persuade unbelievers that Jesus Christ is real. Love is the evidence of true salvation (I Jn 3:14).

If our hearts are right with God and with one another we will also love unbelievers. God certainly does. As is clearly seen from the parable of the good Samaritan, the word "neighbor" includes everyone. Jesus instructed us to go "...into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mr 16:15).

But what gospel do we have to preach if we don't have love? We may have doctrine to teach or a form of religion to propagate. We may be trying to straighten out others' thinking. But unless the love of God is truly "poured out in our hearts" (Rm 5:5), unless it has wrought an eternal change within us which is seeable, we have very little chance to reach the unsaved millions for Christ.

Brothers and sisters, please take heed to this message. This is not an inconsequential consideration. This is not a side issue. This is perhaps the most crucial problem facing the church today!

Do we love as He loves? Do we have the kind of life commitment to Him and to others which the scriptures so clearly exhort us to have? Are we

willing to lay down our lives for each other or for Him – literally (I Jn 3:16)? Do we have more than good feelings for, or an appreciation of, other Christians and the world around us? In short, do we really know and enjoy the love which God has for us and are we too being filled with it?

If we do not have this sort of love in our Christianity, then we are missing something. If this variety of love is lacking, we have only a superficial religion and are failing to know the heart of God. It is evidence that we have not yet known and experienced for ourselves the unlimited love of God.

May God have mercy upon us! May He shine His light into us, revealing what is in our hearts concerning these things, so that He could bring us to yield ourselves totally to Him, thus opening the way for the love of God to be perfected in us.

### **SOME SIMPLE STEPS**

Naturally after reading this message many people will ask such questions as: “How can all this come about?” or “Where can we go to find a group which is practicing these things?”

The answer is that it must begin with you. Don’t wait for others to do it first. Don’t delay until you find a church or “fellowship” which “has it right.” Start where you are and begin to practice these things yourself.

While this might sound quite difficult, I believe it can be accomplished by following these simple steps.

Firstly , we must clearly understand that this love is not something which we can find within ourselves. It only comes from God. The scriptures are clear- "God is love." He has a deep, irreversible love for His people and for all mankind. When we come to Him and open our heart fully, He will fill us with the love that is necessary to fulfill His commands.

Next, it will be necessary to make a decision – a conscious, deliberate, firm decision – to commit yourself to others. Such love does not often come spontaneously. You will probably not be drawn into these relationships by your feelings. In fact your natural reactions to others will probably keep you from it.

Therefore you must resolve from the very beginning not to let anything turn you from this way. Although such a commitment will no doubt have to be remade again and again and will deepen tremendously over time, it is the only place to begin.

While your commitment can and should apply to everyone, only reciprocated love is deeply satisfying. Therefore, secondly, it will eventually be important to find a few like-minded individuals who are willing to join with you in these things.

As you ask Him in prayer, God will lead you to them. No doubt it will take some time to establish intimate relationships with others. It will also involve some sacrifice, patience and possibly tears. Nevertheless, nothing is quite so gratifying as fellowship with people who live in real unity

with each other (Ps 133:1). Such experiences are part of the substance of what the Bible calls “the church.”

Lastly, once such relationships begin to be established don't keep it to yourself. Start reaching out to others with the love of God and teaching them these truths. This is a message that the world needs to hear! God will undoubtedly bless your efforts and you will begin to bring forth fruit abundantly.



## 11.

### ARE YOU DECEIVED?

If asked the question: "Are you deceived?", I believe almost every Christian would answer negatively. They imagine that they are not and probably could not be deceived. However, some of these confident people may be in for a real surprise.

The reason for this is that no one who is deceived realizes it. The very nature of deception is that the person involved in it is unaware of his or her condition. Once someone comes to the realization that they have been misled, deception disappears. Then, they are no longer deceived. Such a person may willingly remain in error or continue adhering to some falsehood, but he is no longer deceived.

Since the individual involved in deception is totally unaware of his plight, there is a very great danger in believing that we are not or that we cannot be deceived. No one should become overconfident concerning his present condition. The frailty of man's nature combined with the subtlety of God's enemy results in the astonishing fact

that almost every professing Christian is in some measure – however small or large it may be – deceived. While this may sound strange, it is nevertheless true.

I can imagine that there are very few believers walking the earth today who are so saturated with Divine truth, whose relationship with God is so intimate and whose lives are so completely free of darkness that they have escaped deception entirely.

All this is being said to point out a simple fact. It is easy to be deceived. Furthermore, when you are a victim of deception you are completely unaware of it.

Consequently, it might be healthy for every reader to take a moment and ask themselves the following questions: “Is it possible that I might in some measure be deceived?” “Could there be some hidden misconception working in my life of which I am totally unaware?” “Is it conceivable that the devil has some strongholds in my heart about which I know nothing?” And, “If there are such undesirable influences present, how can I become free from them?”

Ultimately, the only thing which can expose our deception and liberate us from it is the light of God. Jesus promised His followers that they would not walk in darkness but have the “light of life” (Jn 8:12). If we are deceived it is because we are still living in darkness; there are some areas of our heart which have not been illuminated by God. It is here that the devil and his agents work without our knowledge. However, once the light

of Jesus dawns within us and exposes the darkness, its power is removed. Once we see how we have been misled, we are no longer under the dominion of it. In Jesus Christ, we have the power to overcome the enemy.

One reason that so many believers are still in his grasp is that they have not yielded their life wholly to God and thereby received enough of His light to show them where they are ensnared.

With all this in mind, we will be examining a few of the more common deceptions which are at work in today's Christian community.

## ONE COMMON DECEPTION

We live today in an unusual time, from a biblical point of view. Today, many Christians own one or more Bibles. They have in their hands a marvelous compilation of the words and purposes of God.

In times past, things were different. Before the invention of the printing press, the availability of biblical manuscripts was very limited. They needed to be copied by hand. Further, much of the population of the world in those times was illiterate. Even if everyone had had a copy of the scriptures, they could not have read it.

This modern availability of the Bible is a tremendous blessing. It has made the revelations of God accessible to almost everyone. Those who take the time to read and meditate upon these God-given words, have the privilege of being able to receive understanding concerning God's per-

son and His eternal purposes with much more ease and convenience.

However, there is a danger here of which many are unaware. Due to this availability of the scriptures, it has become easy for man to approach the Word of God from a merely human standpoint. It is all too possible for men and women to try to understand the Bible mentally.

Through study, research and reasoning, they can come to many conclusions concerning what God has written. Further, they begin to confide in, and conduct their lives according to, this mental analysis instead of following a living God.

Thus their human understanding of the Bible becomes their guide in the place of Jesus. As incredible as this may seem, many today substitute knowledge of the Bible for a genuine, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ Himself. In this way, they have been deceived.

In times past, things were quite different. Those who believed in Jesus were pressed to learn to know Him personally and intimately so that they could follow Him. Since most did not have the scriptures immediately available, they needed to learn how to hear from, follow and obey God Himself. It is easy to understand that the early believers and many disciples through the ages, could not and did not depend merely upon writings to guide their life.

The first apostles and others who wrote the New Testament were such men. They became born-again of the Holy Spirit and then began following the risen man, Christ Jesus. Their personal

experience with Him led them to pen letters and historical accounts of Jesus' life which were anointed by and inspired by God. These writings were the result of – not the source of – their intimate relationship with a living, risen Lord.

Of course, when they were able to access parts of the Scriptures including the Old Testament, this was of great help to them. Obviously, what God has revealed of Himself through His written word was extremely precious. Yet they did not look to a book to guide their life. Instead, they learned to know and follow the person Jesus who was revealed in the book.

The Bible was not given to us to use as a textbook. It is not meant to be a manual or guide book by which we should live our lives. It is certainly not meant to be a substitute for God Himself. The Bible was intended to be a means through which God reveals Himself to us. In every page, the nature and person of our Lord is evident. It must be through knowing this Person, that our lives are guided, not merely through following a set of biblical rules or principles.

Yet many have begun to take the Bible as their guide. In a subtle way, it has begun to substitute for a genuine relationship with Jesus in their lives. They consider themselves to be believers in “the Bible” and followers of the “Word.” But instead of seeking to know Jesus in its pages, they have become followers of a book full of laws, principles, practices and doctrines.

Many believe that they are supposed to be following “the word of God” by which they mean the

Bible. However, the truth is that “the Word of God” is a person, not a book. We read in Revelation 19:13: “He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God.”

Although God is revealed in the Bible, following the Bible is not the same thing as following Him. We are called to follow a living Person and not simply a set of rules, regulations and principles.

Let it be very clear here that I am in no way, trying to diminish or discount the importance of the Bible. During my 38 years of following Christ, very few days have passed in which I have not spent time meditating on what God has revealed to us in the Bible. I am convinced that the scriptures which we have today are an accurate and reliable record of what God both said and did in the past. I am persuaded, after many years of meditating on the scriptures, that the contents of the Bible were inspired by God Himself.

Even though all this is true, one thing must become very clear to us. We were not, are not, and in fact cannot be saved by believing in the Bible. The Bible did not die for our sins and resurrect on the third day. This book is not our savior. Mere words, even though they were given by God, apart from the revelation of God Himself, can never save us. We are saved by believing in a living, resurrected Person, Jesus Christ.

We are not urged by the scriptures to believe in a book, but in Jesus. We read: “...you believe in God, believe also in Me” (Jn 14:1). We are not sanctified and transformed simply by following

biblical principles. We are not delivered from our self and our sins by a book. For this kind of salvation to occur, our faith must be in a Person and not in written words as accurate and important as they may be. He is the only One who can save us.

But for many the Bible has become an idol. It is the Bible which they worship and it is upon the Bible they depend. This book has taken the place of God in their lives. Their focus is on the Bible. They are believers in the Bible, followers of the Bible, and preachers of the Bible. In their minds, their "Bible-believing" attitude is the most holy position possible. It is their belief in this book which justifies them in their own minds.

It is a great mistake to try to use the Bible apart from the Author Himself. It is a serious error to use the Bible as a textbook instead of a source through which our Lord can reveal Himself. Such activity can never help us. It will only produce a kind of pride and self-justification which can never please God. It generates a variety of legalistic, mental, dry Christianity which neither saves or delivers those who practice it nor satisfies God.

To aid the reader in understanding this truth, let us take a look at the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They had the Old Testament which was given by God, written down for them. They were educated and literate. So they studied this book daily. From it they extracted many laws, principles and formulas to guide their lives.

They probably spent more time studying the scriptures than many modern Christians. Through their efforts, they became extremely religious. Yet

they failed to come to know the Author. They did not really know the Father. They thought they knew many things about Him, but He Himself they did not know. Their analysis of the Scriptures was human, mental and defective.

Therefore, when God manifested Himself in His Son, they did not know Him. They did not recognize Him as the One who is revealed in the Old Testament. This lack of knowing God Himself led them to hate, persecute and eventually kill the One who wished to reveal Himself to them through the Scriptures. Certainly their mental analysis of this book had done them no good.

Jesus affirmed this truth when He said to them: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (Jn 5:39). God's thought is that we would come to Him, through the scriptures, not use them as a substitute for a relationship with Himself.

We are further warned: "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me" (Jn 5:45,46).

You see, when Moses wrote, He wrote about the reality of God – His true expression which is Jesus. Moses wrote about what the Father had revealed of Himself to him. The same thing is true of all the rest of the scriptures. The men who wrote them down were merely recording what God had shown them concerning Himself, His ways and His desires.

Herein lies a powerful deception into which many believers have fallen. They come to the Bible to study and to learn. Through it they develop many principles and guidelines for their lives and their meetings. Many have excerpted from its pages rules about their clothing styles, activities and haircuts. Others have garnered regulations about how, when and where they meet. Their times together are conducted following many seemingly correct rules and principles they have extracted for the New Testament.

Yet, in far too many cases, they have not become intimate with Jesus. They have succeeded in learning about Him, but have not really come to know Him well. Through their study they have accumulated knowledge concerning God, but they have not developed an intimacy *with* God which has changed their hearts and therefore, their lives. This is an unfortunate, yet common deception among the people of God.

### LACK OF LOVE

This lack of knowing the person of God intimately reveals itself in many ways. One of the most unfortunate manners in which this becomes evident is when someone ceases to agree with a Christian group about some doctrine or practice.

It may be that the leaders of a particular group and the members thereof present an appearance of righteousness. It may be that their dress, doctrines and activities seem biblical and correct. But when someone begins to disagree with them

things can change rapidly. When someone does not any longer conform to their ways and beliefs, suddenly fangs and claws can appear. Their "love" disappears. They begin to reject, hate and persecute those whom they had previously accepted and pretended to love.

This kind of behavior reveals a lack of intimate knowledge of God. It exposes the fact that their "religion" is more mental, (ie. based upon intellectual knowledge) than genuine. These folks have perhaps learned many things *about* God, but have not become intimate with the Lord Himself. This lack is unmasked by the lack of love.

In I John 4:8 we read: "He who does not love does not know God [intimately], for God is love." I have added the word "intimately" here based on the Greek word "know" (GINOSKO), which implies a knowing which is much more than a mere encounter.

It signifies an intimate knowing of the person. Vine, in his dictionary of New Testament words defines this Greek work thusly: "...to come to know, recognize, understand" or "to understand completely."

## THEY DID NOT KNOW ME

The result of this intimate knowing of the person of God is that we express His own feelings, His heart. Since He is love and loves His children profoundly, when we are walking in intimate communion with Him, we too will experience and express these same sentiments.

In Jeremiah 2:8 we read about a similar understanding. God rebukes the studiers of the scriptures in those days saying: "The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' And those who handle the law did not know Me." You see, these were merely religious people. They were "handling" the law, but not seeing beyond what was written. They were leaders and even "priests" of the Lord, but they did not know Him.

Consequently, their decisions and how they interpreted God's word was skewed. It did not reflect the heart of their Maker. Instead, what they did, said and decided was a result of mental, human study of the scriptures and was not a result of knowing God. Their religion was in vain.

In order to use or "handle" the Bible correctly, we must first have an intimacy with the author. It is only through a genuine knowledge of His person that we can really understand what He is revealing. Simple mental, human analysis is not sufficient. It falls far short of the mark. The author of the Scriptures is the only One competent to correctly interpret them.

## THE INVISIBLE JESUS

Some Christians seem to have the notion that, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He disappeared into heaven. Then, to compensate for His absence, arranged for us to have the Bible as a kind of instruction manual to follow while He was gone. Perhaps they suppose that if they follow the guidance of the Bible correctly then, when

Jesus returns, He will reward them for their obedience.

The fallacy of this thinking is that Jesus is not absent from this world. He is simply invisible. He has not left us alone to follow the Bible, but He requires us to know and follow Him through the Holy Spirit.

When He sent the Holy Spirit to us He said something very interesting. He stated: "I am... coming to you (Jn 14:28 KJV ). He indeed did not leave us alone. He came back to us invisibly in "the Spirit." We read: "Now the Lord *is* that Spirit" (II Cor 3:17).

Who is this Lord? Obviously it is Jesus. How can this be? The Lord, who is Jesus, is actually the Spirit? Certainly, this is so. It is a clear teaching of the scriptures. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are not separate beings. Jesus and the Spirit are as one with each other as Jesus is with His Father (Jn 10:30).

The fact is that the Spirit of God is the same as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul illustrates this when he refers to the Holy Spirit as "...the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Php 1:19). It is clear that there is only one Spirit, not two. We read: "There is one body and one Spirit..." (Eph 4:4). There can be no such thing as the Holy Spirit separate and distinct from Spirit of Jesus Christ as if there were two different "Spirits."

Therefore, when we know and interact with the Holy Spirit, we are at the same time knowing and interacting with Jesus Christ. He is with us – right here and now – in and through the Holy

Spirit. They are absolutely inseparable. "Now the Lord [really] is that Spirit" (II Cor 3:17).

All of this is to say that we still need to follow the person Jesus Christ just as the first disciples did. He is not absent. We are not limited merely to obeying instructions found in a book, as important as that book might be. Jesus is present with us right now and forever. He said: "...and lo, *I am with you always*, even to the end of the age. Amen" (Mt 28:20). He is "with us" today. Consequently, we must know and follow Him personally.

Please pay careful attention to this fact: Although Jesus is definitely and accurately revealed in His Book, following the book is not the same thing as following Him.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus did something very unusual to teach His disciples this truth. He frequently appeared and disappeared. When He appeared, He knew what they had been saying and doing in His "absence." Why did He do this? What was His message? He was showing them graphically and unmistakably that He was always with them. Whether He was visibly present or invisibly present, He was always there.

Jesus was teaching them to begin to depend upon His invisible presence and not get stuck always wanting Him to appear physically. He was instructing them that they could know and follow Him just as they always had when He was visible, even though now they could not see Him.

When Jesus walked the earth, He was in one small country in one location at a time. The number of His disciples was small. Therefore, His

physical presence was sufficient. But today, this number of disciples has grown. There are millions, if not billions, of believers in the world today. Our Lord cannot be physically present with each one of them, since this would require Him to have millions of bodies. Yet, His invisible presence through the Holy Spirit is always with each and every one of us.

## DECEIVED BY REVELATION

Biblical revelation is good. Assuming that what has been revealed comes from God and therefore is biblical, it is of great value. Such revelation gives us direction. It helps us to understand God and His purposes. It aids us by showing us our spiritual path onward and how we can become more like Jesus. Yet, it is possible and even common for people to be deceived by such genuine revelation. How could such a thing be?

Let me try to explain this by giving an illustration. From the window in my kitchen in Brazil I can see a very tall mountain in the distance. By the grace of God I still have good vision and so, on a clear day, I can see the outline of that mountain quite clearly. Yet, in spite of this clarity of vision, I am not there. I am not on top of that mountain.

In order to arrive on that peak I would have to travel a great distance, perhaps 30 to 40 miles. I am quite sure that there is no road going up that mountain. To get to the top therefore, would involve a lot of work. There would be other mountains to climb and descend, rushing streams

and/or rivers to cross, thick jungle growth to get through, an army of mosquitoes and other bugs to combat along with poisonous snakes, spiders and plants, much sweat to endure and fatigue to overcome. If and when I were able to reach the summit of that mountain, I would be a person with many more experiences and much more personal knowledge of that mountain than I am at present simply sitting in my kitchen.

The same thing is true of revelation. We may see some biblical truths with clarity. They may be true in every way. Yet, until they become our experience through many trials and much time and testing, they remain only remote understanding, yet nothing which is truly real in our lives.

Yet many, seeing for the first time some exciting revelations, begin to think of themselves as the fulfillment of what they have seen. They begin to imagine that they are what they have seen, just because they have glimpsed something.

As an example, let me share with you an experience I had as a young believer. I was meeting with a group which had recently received some teaching about the “overcomers” in the book of Revelation. Much of this teaching was based on the promises of Jesus to those in the seven churches who would hear His word and overcome. This was an exciting and captivating revelation.

Soon however, we thought of ourselves as *the* overcomers. Since we had understood something about what this means, we began to imagine that we were what we had seen. We rejoiced in the revelation, thinking that since we had understood

it, we were it. We thought of ourselves as overcomers and even called ourselves "overcomers." We secretly began to look down on those who did not have this revelation and therefore, obviously, were not overcomers like ourselves. From hindsight, it is clear that we were very deceived.

Dear friend, through the years one thing has become very clear: to see is not the same thing as to be and, to understand is not the same thing as to live out the reality of what we have perceived. It takes much time and experience for God to work into our lives what He has shown to us. It is not sufficient merely to see and understand. We must seek God, asking Him to make what we have seen an integral, genuine part of our lives.

For example, it would be possible for someone to become an expert on the afore mentioned mountain without ever climbing up it.

They could "Google" it. They could buy topographical maps and learn about the terrain. They could find out about the climate, the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded there in all four seasons. They could familiarize themselves with facts about the humidity of the air and the amount of rainfall. They could find someone who had analyzed the soil and geography and learn from them. They could study the various plants which grew there, including trees, orchids, ferns, vines, etc.

They could find out about the animal life on that mountain, no doubt including a great variety of beasts, birds and bugs. They may even be able to find others who had climbed up there and dis-

cover the best access routes and possible problems. The availability of potable water, the best times of year to climb, the time necessary to ascend and descend and many other facts could be studied and learned. In the end, this person could become a “Doctor” of facts about this mountain without ever having been there.

This little story has a very real application to the practice of Christianity. Is it possible that our Christian lives have much more to do with what we have learned *about* Christ than with our actual experience *of* Christ? Could it be that we have filled ourselves with a tremendous amount of knowledge about Him but not spent much time having intimate fellowship with Him?

Are we really following Jesus or are we simply following some precepts and customs which we have learned? Is it the Christ who is really reigning over us or are we simply conforming ourselves to the expected pattern of the group or church which we attend?

Is our Christian behavior merely a result of what we learned about God or genuine transformation which results from intimacy with God? Dear friends, these are serious and important considerations.

## **BRONZE SERPENTS**

Many believers enjoy revelation. Obviously, revelation is important for all of us. Without it, we really don't have any goals. We don't have any direction or understand where it is that we are

supposed to be going. We are blind and in darkness. Revelation is both essential and delightful.

It is necessary that we see and understand many things concerning the plans and purposes of our God. The more He reveals to us, the more we can cooperate with Him in His work. Through revelation, we have divine direction and objectives. When we have a greater understanding of His person and work, we can be more easily led by Him and waste less time doing works which are not satisfying His heart.

Even though all this is true, revelation also can become a kind of trap. It can become an idol. It can easily become a substitute for a relationship with Jesus Himself. Incredibly, revelation about Jesus can subtly take the place of intimacy with Jesus. This is a type of deception which also is extremely common in the church today.

It is easy today to encounter individuals or even groups of Christians who have a lot of revelation. They have read many books, perhaps by Watchman Nee, A.W. Tozer, Andrew Murray, Charles Finney, T. Austin-Sparks, etc. Through literature or teaching, they have come to understand and see many important, spiritual truths.

Their level of comprehension concerning many biblical mysteries is, in some cases, astounding. Yet, for far too many, their everyday living does not reflect the nature of Christ. How can such a thing be?

One problem is that frequently, these revelations are things received secondhand. These believers have understood what others have seen.

But they have not yet become their own experience. God has not yet worked these things into their lives so that these revelations have actually become real to them personally.

Such secondhand or even thirdhand revelation quite easily makes the person who receives it proud. They become puffed up because they have understood certain truths. It is not infrequent that such believers never move on to actually know these things for themselves.

It is natural that once we see and understand some revelations, we begin to rejoice in what we have seen. Perhaps we find others who also have come to know the same things, or have received these revelations from us. But here too is a danger.

If we are not careful, soon our meetings and our fellowship with these others becomes centered around these certain understandings. Our focus becomes our revelations. Our sphere of meetings and/or fellowship becomes dedicated to repeating and propagating these certain truths.

In many cases, the hearts of believers become captivated by these revelations. They begin to seek to know with ever more clarity, the deep things of God. When they open the Bible, it is revelation which they are seeking. They are always buying new books which might contain new viewpoints on the Scriptures. Yet in all this, it is possible that they are not truly becoming more intimate with Jesus Christ.

You see, revelation too can become a god. It can become an idol in your life. It is something which can attract and capture your heart, replac-

ing an intimacy with Jesus. This is something very subtle. Assuming that these revelations are both biblical and true, it is often difficult to see how we can be misled by them or misuse them. Yet it is a common ailment in many groups of believers.

The bronze serpent which Moses made in the wilderness, was ordained by God (Num 21:8,9). It was the Lord who instructed him to make it. Further, it was used by God to miraculously heal thousands. Yet with the passage of time, it became an idol. People began to worship it rather than the Lord. So, when Hezekiah became king and orchestrated a kind of revival or return to the Lord, he broke the brass serpent in pieces and destroyed it (II Kings 8:4).

In the same way today many individuals or even groups of believers are meeting around some kind of biblical understanding instead of a Person. Their unity is based upon some revelation or other and not on the Lord.

How many, for example, meet around some particular way of taking "the Lord's table," some practice or "stand" about "how to meet," or any number of other doctrines, patterns or "revelations?" This could be the baptism of the Holy Spirit, healing or end times prophecy. It could involve the name of their church or even the lack of a name. The list is endless.

Unfortunately, it is not difficult to find groups who spend their time together simply repeating the same series of revelations to each other, rejoicing in the fact that they are some of the few who have such deep understanding.

Yet in far too many cases, the daily lives of these believers do not reflect the character of their Maker. Their transformation has not caught up with their revelation. Yet they are blinded to this fact because they have seen so much. They think that they have much more revelation than many other Christians. So they continue on rejoicing in, meeting around and even worshipping their revelations while Jesus Himself is pushed to the side.

As an example of this I would like to tell the story of a friend of mine. He and his family left the U.S. to be missionaries in South Africa. He was a brother with a lot of revelation who understood much of what many call "the deeper life" teachings. So while in South Africa he naturally gravitated toward fellowship with others who had a similar understanding of the Bible.

But when he returned to the U.S. he was completely disillusioned. He had come to a kind of crisis in his faith, questioning much of what he had believed. Why was this? It was because his relationships with others who had these same revelations was so disappointing. In spite of all their understanding, they did not reflect the nature of Christ.

One woman in particular stood out to Him. She was always talking about these wonderful "deep things." She was a major proponent of the authors which we have already mentioned. Her focus was these fantastic revelations. Yet her life was a shambles.

Her marriage was bad. She was not living the things which she had seen but she was blinded to

this fact due to the “greatness” of what she had understood. Her life was a kind of lie which had a great impact on this dear brother. Instead of transmitting Christ to him, she actually undermined his faith by her testimony.

Significantly Paul the apostle writes: “And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (I Cor 8:2). Certainly true “knowing” must be knowing the Person who gives us knowledge and not merely understanding many biblical truths.

### SEE MUCH, DO LITTLE

One thing has impressed me very much while observing today’s church. There is one fact which is very disturbing. It seems that the groups which have the most revelation, do the least. They have so much understanding, yet the world around them is impacted very little.

Instead of being motivated by these great truths to go out and minister Jesus to the multitudes, they begin to focus on themselves and their revelations. Their group becomes a kind of ingrown toenail curving in upon itself.

Soon they begin to think of themselves as some kind of “remnant.” They imagine that they are especially chosen by God to practice a certain thing or to believe in some special teachings.

They then “circle the wagons” around what they do or believe and begin to try to protect their beliefs and practices from error. They imagine themselves to be the guardians of a whole series

of special truths with which they have been entrusted. These truths become the focus of their lives. This is a common and very deep deception.

Others who don't agree with their understandings are subtly excluded. The uninitiated are looked upon with disfavor, distrust or even with fear. These believers begin to look inward instead of outward. Their focus becomes their revelations and practices.

Instead of preaching Jesus, they gravitate towards trying to convince others, especially other Christians, of the correctness of their special ways, revelations and doctrines. Thus, they become unfruitful in a truly spiritual way.

## SELF DECEPTION

With all this in mind, I would like to take a look at a scripture verse which speaks about still another common form of deception. James 1:22 reads: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." This is also a very common kind of delusion among God's people. It is a kind of self-deception which has as its victims many who consider themselves to be upstanding, "Bible-believing" Christians.

This folly has in its grasp children of God from all kinds of denominational persuasions, from many diverse schools of doctrinal opinion and from a great variety of religious experience. It has lulled to sleep multitudes who would probably vehemently insist that they are intimately acquainted with the truth and have no room in

their life for deception. Perhaps the worst cases of this condition occur among those who have been Christians for many years.

This deception works in the following way: we say we believe in Jesus but we do not follow Him. When we hear the word of the Lord, agree with it in our minds, and do nothing, it is in full operation. It is very common today to meet Christians who are well acquainted with the Scripture, who appear to concur completely with what God is saying to them through it – but who do very little!

How we love to hear messages from the preachers we really admire. How enjoyable it is to read books by those authors who express the facts exactly as we believe them. How often we have been excited about the “new things” which God is showing us. And how deceived we are if we continue to live the same way we always have. This is a very prevalent form of deception in modern Christianity.

We often feel justified merely by the fact that we have heard the truth and agreed with it. This attitude is easily substituted for the activity of both hearing and then obeying. If we are to escape deception, we must be responding to what we hear from the Lord! We must be doing what God speaks to us! We are to be fulfilling the word by moving out in the direction in which God is leading.

A similar form of delusion can also arise from reading many Christian biographies. For example, there are so many good books available

which tell of the mighty things God has done through believers down through the centuries. The histories of Hudson Taylor with the China Inland Mission, George Mueller and his orphanage in England, Brother Andrew the Bible smuggler, David Wilkerson on the streets of New York City and many others have been published.

These are valuable books. Reading them can be extremely worthwhile. As we learn of what God has done through others, it can really stimulate our faith. However, I fear that far too many Christians are doing their works for God vicariously. This means that they are living their lives through books rather than actually getting out there and doing something themselves.

We often read about what men and women of God have done. We get excited by the works of faith which they have accomplished. We thrill at the dangers through which they pass and marvel at seeing how the hand of God protected and guided them. Then, somehow we imagine that, because we are stirred by what we read and can identify with what they have done, our lives too measure up to God's standard. Somehow we feel that our works are similar to theirs.

The sad truth of the matter is that for most believers this is not the case. Far too many Christians are simply hearers of the word and actually serve God very little. They are not really "doers." Oh, they may go to Christian meetings, they may watch Christian television programs and listen to Christian music. They may even be "involved" in their church, but in some measure

they are deceived. The evidence of this problem can be clearly seen by the inactivity and lack of fruitfulness in their everyday lives.

The Bible teaches us that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:20). When we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we are going to be judged according to our works. Why are our works so important? For this simple reason. What we do is a sure indication of what we are. The things which we accomplish are the evidence of what is really going on within our hearts.

Interestingly, the standard is not how much revelation we have. It is not what we have or have not understood. It is how much our genuine relationship with Jesus has changed our lives. It is how much our intimacy with Him has stimulated us to follow Him in service to others.

There is actually no conflict between faith and works. If we have faith – genuine faith – it will produce works. True faith will bring us into an intimacy with Jesus which will stimulate us to reach out in His name, facing the dangers, resistances and our own fears – overcoming the things which hinder us – and working the works of God while there is still time (Jn 9:4). “He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit” (Jn 1:5).

Therefore, if you are not daily serving Jesus Christ in some real, practical way – following the leading of God’s Holy Spirit – then you are in some measure deceived. Anyone who is spending their time in spiritual idleness is badly deceived. They have been lulled to sleep by a subtle deception – a lie that whispers something like this in

their ear: "If you go the 'best' place and do what is expected of you, if you believe the 'right way,' if you read your Bible and pray occasionally, if you don't do anything really sinful...you are right with God." However, we can only be counted righteous before God if we have a relationship with Him which produces fruit in our lives.

Now I know that there are some who will insist that works and obedience are good but that they are not essential. They argue that God's favor can only be gained through faith. While it is certainly true that a right relationship with God comes only through faith, it does not come through the kind of faith which is barren.

Genuine faith produces communion with God. This communion results in fruitful obedience. If your faith does not, then it is useless. Far too often what Christians call "faith" is nothing more than a mental agreement with some Bible doctrine. True faith, on the other hand is something which brings you into such an intimate relationship with God Himself that it changes your life. The evidence of such life-changing faith is the bearing of fruit.

If this does not describe your life, then it is safe to conclude that you are a victim of deception. Somehow, you have been deluded into thinking that what you are experiencing is real Christianity.

## **NEITHER BARREN NOR UNFRUITFUL**

When God made you and subsequently called you out of darkness into His light, He did so with

a specific plan in mind. He has begotten each individual with the intention that they would accomplish certain things for Him while they are on this earth.

The Bible says that we were “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). God has called us to be neither “barren nor unfruitful” (II Pet 1:8).

There is a job for everyone to do. There is a ministry within Christ’s body for each one to perform. Christian work is not the responsibility of some special clergy or select few. There is no room for spectators among God’s people.

It is incumbent upon every believer to discover God’s assignment for their lives and then, through His grace and power, labor to accomplish it. His will is for us to bring forth much fruit – fruit which remains (Jn 15:16).

Of course Jesus is not asking something which we can accomplish with our own strength. Simply doing some kind of work in the church such as ushering, being part of the worship group or engaging in some kind of Christian ministry may not fulfill God’s desires. It is quite possible to be very active, doing many “things,” and still not be meeting God’s standard.

On Judgment day, when we stand before His throne, all our works will be tested by fire. Only certain kinds of works will endure that test. These are the deeds which were initiated by the Lord Himself. These are not things which we have done “for God” but things which Jesus Christ has

actually done through us. Since as Christians we now have the Spirit of God living within us, it is entirely possible, and in fact essential, to let Him become the source of all that we do.

As we grow in this experience, our lives will become increasingly fruitful. We will then be the channels through which Jesus is accomplishing His purposes in this world. These are the sort of works which will be approved when we stand before Him. These are the activities which were truly “wrought in God” (Jn 3:21).

What God is requiring of you and me is a life which is led by His Spirit. It is a life of obedience to His will. It is a life which will be filled with reaching out and serving others in Jesus’ name, imparting to them what God is pouring into us.

Jesus Christ was our supreme example. He was always led by the Spirit. He was continually working the works of God (Jn 10:32). He was daily doing what He saw the Father doing (Jn 5:19).

Jesus was not living for Himself. Not one minute of His life was spent in self-serving activities. His entire existence was focused upon one objective – doing the will of the Father. If we are to be real Christians, being pleasing to our God, this also must be our experience.

The kind of life-style I am advocating here may be quite different from the one you are now living. You may be realizing that the foregoing description is quite unlike the life you now lead. If this is your situation, the solution is repentance.

You must humble yourself before God and admit that you have allowed yourself to be

deceived. You must confess your sin of disobedience and present yourself to God afresh, telling Him that you are now completely His and that you are willing to follow Him anywhere.

Once you come to this position, you will certainly begin to experience God in a new and exciting way. He is continually looking for men and women who will do His will and so when He finds your heart genuinely open to Him, He will pour Himself out to you. Then you will be empowered to work the works of God on this earth. Then you will begin to experience genuine New Testament Christianity.

### **AWAKE, AWAKE**

God is speaking to His people today. "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Eph 5:14). The kind of lives which we read about in the Bible and also in many Christian biographies were lives which were totally given to Jesus. They were lives whose only priority was God.

Now to get there from where you are today may demand a major restructuring of your priorities. It might possibly mean a change of occupation, employment or living situation. It no doubt will require abandoning many self-centered pleasures which now fill your life. It may necessitate leaving the safety and security of your own country, family and friends. It may even mean facing dangers of which you have never dreamed or which you have secretly feared in your heart.

But if your faith is genuine as opposed to simply a mental deception, then it demands action.

I cannot tell you what God might require you to do. Only He can reveal this to you. I am simply saying this: If you are doing nothing then you are not walking in faith and communion with God. He is calling you today to repentance and this repentance is no doubt going to involve some radical changes in your life.

I want to make it very clear here that I am speaking about a life of service, not success. The kind of life God requires of you and me is not an easy one. It is not composed of luxury, earthly power and self-gratification as so many preachers today would like us to believe. Instead it is a life of self-denial, sacrifice and difficulty.

We are discussing here a life which is poured out upon the Body of Jesus Christ – a kind of spiritual offering to the Father.

However, such an existence is also supremely satisfying. Nothing in this world can fill your inner emptiness like God. When you yield your life to Him and fill your moments with His service, He in turn will fill you with Himself. Jesus' desire is to express Himself to the world. And so, when He finds your heart open and ready, He will give Himself to you without reserve.

Do you desire this kind of experience? Does this strike some chord within your heart? Would you enjoy living this way? If so, please know that it is entirely possible. God is the same today as He has always been. He can do things in you and through you that you never dreamed possible.

Are you deceived? Only you and God can ultimately know. But as a friend and a brother, I warn you that it is especially easy to be enticed by the seducing spirits of this age and to be lulled to sleep by an easy Christianity.

The New Testament gives us abundant examples of men and women who got up and left all to follow Jesus. These were people who sacrificed everything for the sake of His name. They were doers of the word. They are the ones which were praised by God. They were the kind of people which God commands us to be.

## 12.

### TRUE MINISTRY

Some believers, after receiving the Lord, have a growing interest in becoming involved in ministry. They have received gifts from the Holy Spirit. They have met the God of the universe and are enthusiastic to serve Him, influence others and impact the world around them. They have a zeal for God's work and are anxious to further His kingdom.

This is a good thing. It would be very encouraging if all those who receive Jesus had this desire to serve and please God. It would be nice to see many with the same commitment.

Unfortunately, in far too many cases, these well-meaning individuals do not arrive at the end result they seek. It is very common to see them go off on various tangents and miss the mark of what true ministry means. The sad result of this is that they do not become really effective in their work.

Their efforts are often energetic but not truly powerful and do not produce much lasting fruit. All too many become discouraged and do not

continue on to serve the Lord in the fullness which could be theirs.

Many begin their journey toward what they think of as “ministry” by studying, be it in seminary or Bible school. Others participate in various kinds of “training” experiences with different types of groups. These can include things such as training in theater, mime, puppets, dance and music. Having an acquaintance with the scriptures and participating in attempts to spread the gospel is undoubtedly a positive thing. These are experiences which God can use in the lives of these individuals as they walk with Him.

But here a misconception can occur. True ministry is not merely sharing information with others concerning the things which we have studied. Genuine ministry is not just engaging in activities such as evangelism or church planting. True ministry is the transmission to others of what we have experienced of Jesus Himself. It is God being revealed in and through His servants. It is ministering the Lord Himself to others.

One of the Greek words which is translated “minister” in the New Testament, is *DIAKONOS* which literally means “dispenser.” True ministers are “dispensers” of Christ, pouring out to others the things with which God Himself has filled them. We could think of this as being “dispensers” of Jesus.

Just as a soda machine dispenses soda pop when you open the valve, so we too should be so full of Jesus that when people are open to us, then they also can receive some of Him through us.

True ministry is not just passing along information about Jesus. In order for any ministry to be powerful and genuine, the things which we minister must first become real in our lives. We must first experience them ourselves. It is then, and only then, that we can minister to others in an effective way.

For example, many will preach that "Jesus saves." But are those reciting these words actually being saved themselves? Are they truly being changed? Is their character being fundamentally altered? Are they being delivered from sin? Is their daily life an expression of the purity and holiness of God? Is Jesus' character, including patience, longsuffering and love, being seen in them?

If not, then this phrase "Jesus saves" becomes just an empty slogan. It is powerless to help anyone else. If it is not working for the person preaching, how much less will it aid those who are hearing him?

You see, you cannot pass on to others something which you yourself don't have. You cannot minister truths which are not real to you. The fact that "Jesus saves" is true in an eternal sense does not change this reality. Unless and until we have experienced this eternal truth for ourselves, we are powerless to minister it effectively to others.

Far too many today are content with knowledge. They have studied and learned. They have read books and heard teaching and preaching. Through this, they have accumulated a mental understanding of many biblical truths. Once hav-

ing understood them, they imagine that they are then qualified to “minister” them to others. Yet this is not the case. We can only effectively share with others what we ourselves actually have.

The “ministry” of truths which are only theoretical in the lives of those ministering, fills the church of our day with a palpable sense of unreality. Those hearing these messages do not really expect their lives to change. Since it is obvious to a careful observer that many of the preachers are not experiencing the things which they affirm, the hearers also lose confidence that these truths could be real to them.

Soon Christianity becomes, for many church attenders, a sort of vague, “spiritual” experience. It turns into a pie-in-the-sky someday when you die kind of fairy tale.

Many come to hear preaching and teaching, already expecting to hear things which have had little if any effect on the preachers and they also do not expect to change their own lives either. This produces believers who have a form of godliness, but do not have the power of God operating in their lives (II Tim 3:5).

An unfortunate consequence of this lack of reality in the church is that many other equally unreal things also find space to enter in. Many other spurious and even wrong doctrines and practices are spread through different congregations while very few perceive the unreality of them. But this is logical. If the gospel is not very real to them, then other equally unreal things might easily be accepted as true too.

## THE SOURCE OF TRUE MINISTRY

In order to effectively minister Jesus Christ, we must have become intimate with Him. We must have spent time in His presence. We must have walked with Him through many and various life experiences. Our faith must have been tested and tried. Our faithfulness and obedience also will need to be proved over time and through many difficult circumstances. We must have come to know God personally and intimately.

It is not sufficient to simply have learned *about* Him through some instruction, teaching or training. Our understanding of Him cannot be second hand, but must be genuine and personal.

Such experience is not something which happens overnight. It is neither cheap or easy. Those who are truly intimate with God and therefore have something worthwhile to minister are those who have spent a lot of time in His presence. These are those who have passed through the fire of many trials. They are servants who have been found faithful through testing and adversity.

Perhaps we could take Moses as an example here. At forty years of age, he was convinced that God had called him and chosen him to liberate the people of Israel.

We read: "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand" (Acts 7:25). It obvious that since he expected "his brethren" to understand this, he himself also

knew it. And he was right. He was the man called by God to do a mighty work of deliverance.

So, being confident of his calling and seeing an opportunity, he began his work for God. He proceeded to kill one Egyptian and then flee into the desert. This was all he could manage. His own intelligence, preparation, determination and even divine calling led to this fiasco.

Moses was one of few men ever to be used by God in such a dramatic and powerful way as he was used in later life. But such a ministry needed more than just willingness, an understanding of his calling and human preparation in the courts of Pharaoh. He also needed molding in the hands of God. This preparation lasted forty long years.

At the end of this time, Moses' self-confidence had disappeared. His natural energy and zeal to "fulfill his calling" had evaporated long ago. He no longer was anxiously waiting for his chance to shine while he single-handedly delivered God's people from bondage.

He was no longer a young man full of ambition and natural strength. We read: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num 12:3 KJV).

It was after this treatment and preparation by God that Moses was ready to work together with God to accomplish His plans. He had become extremely humble and meek. He had been molded by the hand of God.

Paul, the apostle, was another man who was mightily used by God. Yet he too needed divine preparation. Naturally, Paul was a strong, intelli-

gent, capable person. He had a fleshly, strong, religious zeal for God which led Him to oppose what the Lord was really doing. He had certain advantages of birth and position. So, before God could really use him, these things had to be treated. They needed to be broken down and eliminated.

Shortly after his conversion, Paul spent some years in the wilderness. There, he spent time in the presence of God. It was during this period that the Lord changed him.

When he first converted, he was immediately in the synagogues and in the temple, disputing with the religious leaders. His natural zeal and energy had been transferred to his Christianity.

Yet, this was not sufficient. This was merely Paul working for God but not God working through Paul. The Lord wanted much more from him than winning debates with religious leaders. He desired to express His own life and nature through this vessel.

When God's treatment was finished, Paul was no longer disputing and arguing. He was ministering the person of Christ. His confidence in his natural strength, intelligence and abilities had been broken. He states: "...when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor 12:10). He also quotes what Jesus said to him: "...My power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor 12:9).

You see, there is a great difference in our doing things *for* God and God doing them through us. The first is a kind of religious, human effort which is not very effective in changing lives. The second is a powerful manifestation of the

Person of Jesus Christ. This is the substance of genuine ministry. Unless and until we arrive at the point of being prepared to minister the person of Jesus Christ to others, we will have little real impact on the perishing world around us.

## **PRIDE AND AMBITION**

Now we come to the place where very many men (and women) of God fall. This is one of the more common ways in which they deviate from the work and will of God and go off in their own direction. It works like this:

When God begins to use them, when their ministry begins to blossom and impact others, when more and more people begin looking to them and at them for blessings and guidance, they become proud.

It is very easy, when the God of the universe begins to use you in some way or other, to allow thoughts to creep into your head. These thoughts may go something like this: "God is using me. I am an especially chosen instrument of His. I have gifts that seem to be superior to those of others." It is not rare for these and many, many other such thoughts to spring up in our minds.

But pride, when it germinates in the human heart, brings an end to genuine ministry. It contaminates what God is doing. It pollutes the pure things which God is giving to that person so that when it flows out through them, it is no longer righteous. It has been tainted by the fleshly, human ego.

How easy it is, when the anointing of the Holy Spirit is upon you, to take a ride yourself. How common it is, when God is flowing through you, for the flesh to enter into what is happening and take some of the glory. How natural it is instead of glorifying only God, to take the opportunity to let others see how great you are and how much God is using you.

Let us take as an example a preacher. Let us imagine that the Lord has given this brother a special message. As he preaches, the anointing comes upon him and he senses a special flowing of divine power.

Soon, he allows himself to be swept up in this flow. He begins to enter into the game himself. He catches the wave. He allows his own feelings to express themselves. Maybe he pounds the pulpit. Perhaps he modifies his voice, runs around or shouts. He begins to let his emotions enjoy what has been given, not for himself, but for others.

Soon, he becomes an actor in his personal theater of "ministry," enjoying the attention, limelight and fame. He uses the power of God, which was given to serve others, to gratify his desire for recognition and honor among men. Pride has entered in and contaminated the work of God.

This same error is often experienced by those leading worship. When the presence of God is manifested in a strong way, they begin to bask in this aura. Instead of "retreating" or stepping back and letting God alone be glorified, they begin to take center stage and soak up some of the glory for themselves.

Along these lines, it is easy to wonder why is it that almost all those who lead in worship are up in the front where people can see them? Couldn't they function just as well from the rear where they do not draw attention to themselves?

There is no doubt that there exists, even in the secular world, a kind of "high" – a special sensation of power and exhilaration – that people feel when holding sway over a large audience. Musicians and actors are well acquainted with this feeling.

There is nothing like the "rush" you can feel when the whole audience is moving in rhythm with your beat (message, gift, etc.) They are looking at you! They are mesmerized and captivated by what you are doing. Wow! Aren't you something! The feeling of power is awesome.

But, my dear brothers and sisters, this is carnal. This is human. It is not from heaven. Instead, it is from below. This kind of thing stokes the fire of human pride. It brings glory to the person and not to God. It is a pit into which many men and women of God fall when He begins to use them with the intention of glorifying Himself.

Pride alienates us from God. We read that "God resists the proud" (Js 4:4; I Pet 5:5). As our ego increases, He moves away. He begins to distance Himself from us. We read: "Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Pr 16:5). We are also told: "A haughty look, a proud heart... are sin" (Pr 21:4).

Perhaps you remember the first one in history who began to use the gifts and anointing of God

to glorify himself. This individual had been chosen and raised up by God to do a work for Him. He had received power and gifts. He had been given amazing abilities to do his work.

But with the passage of time, he began to enjoy others noticing him. He started to like being the center of attention. He soon basked in the light of having others admire and even worship him.

His pride germinated and began to grow. Soon, he began to use these things that God had given him to attract and draw a large number of followers to himself. The name of this individual is Satan. Are you following in his footsteps?

## THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

When Jesus walked on this earth, He gave us a completely different example. He walked in humility. He never sought personal fame or recognition. In fact, it seems as if He did everything backwards from a human point of view.

For example, when he cured people, He strictly instructed them to keep quiet about it. He didn't want anyone to know. We read that after cleansing the leper: "He charged him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded' " (Lk 5:14).

This is just one example among many in which Jesus insisted that those who experienced miracles not tell anyone.

Yet Jesus was the Son of God. He was the Savior of the world. How is it that He did not

desire to be known and become famous? Shouldn't this be exactly what He needed to seek? Didn't He need to expand His ministry and reach as many as possible?

Yet such attitudes had no place in Jesus' heart or work. He did not seek to be known. He did nothing to promote His own fame, expand His ministry or gain recognition.

One time his own brothers confronted Him about this very thing saying: "For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world" (Jn 7:4).

They were exactly right. Anyone who wants fame and recognition should act as they suggested. They should use every opportunity. But what they didn't realize is that Jesus was not seeking to be "known openly." That wasn't His goal. His heart did not yearn for these things. He did things secretly for exactly this reason, so nothing fleshly or human would enter into His ministry.

Incredibly, Jesus was not seeking followers. He wasn't trying to impress anyone. He was not using the miraculous things which the Father did through Him to advance His prestige, line His ministry coffers or attract the multitudes. In fact, many times He deliberately avoided the waiting throngs.

One of my favorite verses reads: "And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side" (Mt 8:18). How unlike the natural human tendency this is! We might expect something much different.

Let us imagine that pastor Joe Schmoe, sees a great multitude before him. He may imagine that this is his chance to “minister.” There is the crowd waiting to hear him! So he jumps up on the nearest boulder, gets the attention of the multitude and begins to preach.

This would seem the normal scenario, but it was not Jesus’ way. He avoided fame. He refused earthly honor. He clearly stated: “I do not receive honor from men” (Jn 5:41). Not only did Jesus not seek it, He did not accept it if and when it came! Earthly honor, glory and fame had nothing to do with His ministry. He avoided such things because they were human and tainted with the sin of pride and ambition.

Yes, Jesus did sometimes minister to and teach the multitudes; but He did it only for godly reasons. He often “had compassion on them” because of their needs and lost condition (Mt 9:36; 14:14). His ministry to them had nothing to do with seeking fame or followers.

When the multitudes came to make Him king, He went away. We read: “Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone” (Jn 6:15). Such earthly honor had no place in His plans and purposes.

Another time, Jesus was ministering in a small village. The people there liked what they heard. They were really impressed. So, when the next day dawned, the crowd came looking for Him wanting more of the same.

But when they tried to find Jesus, He was nowhere around. So they went out searching for Him. When they finally found Him, He was in the desert praying. They then tried to persuade Him to come back. "But He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent' " (Lk 4:43).

## YOU ARE THE CHRIST!

There is no doubt that Jesus was and is the Christ of God. Peter was one of the first to receive this revelation. A person would naturally suppose that since this was the core, the very essence of His ministry, Jesus would want everyone to know about it. He would desire that this revelation would be spread abroad to the whole world.

Yet, in striking contrast to this natural thinking, after Peter's confession, "...He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ" (Mt 16:20).

What? Tell no one? How in the world could the Son of God not want everyone to know who and what He was? It was because nothing human interested Him. He was not seeking recognition. He was only doing the things which His Father had sent Him to do.

If then our Lord and Master refused earthly fame and honor, where does that leave us? Where should our hearts be? What are we really seeking? What is more important to us, the praise of men or the praise of God? (Jn 12:43).

## THE ESSENCE OF MINISTRY

Jesus was seeking nothing for Himself. He was not looking for fame or fortune. He wasn't even desiring that everyone would like Him or approve of Him. He had another motive. He was only doing what He saw the Father doing.

Jesus was not doing His own thing. He wasn't even speaking words out of His own heart. He was motivated in every way by a higher source. We read: "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (Jn 14:10).

Here is Jesus' secret. Here is the source of all true ministry. The Father lived inside of Him. He was filled to overflowing with the life of God. So it was this life which motivated Him.

It was this supernatural fountain which was the source of His words, actions, feelings and even expressions. Jesus was not alone. The Father was always with Him and even inside of Him. We read: "And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (Jn 8:29).

In the same way, any true ministry on our part cannot be something which springs from ourselves. Its source cannot be us.

Instead, it must be something which originates from the Life of God within us. It must be Jesus who is initiating what is said or done. He and He alone is the source of all true ministry. Ministry is never something which we do for

God. Instead, it is the words and works which God does through us.

Here there is no room for pride. There is no space for self-seeking. God must be the only one who is glorified. To the extent that we allow our ego and pride to enter into what God desires to do, to that same extent the power and effectiveness of what is ministered is diminished.

Some years ago, there was a great revival in the country of Wales. During that time, almost everyone in the nation was converted. One man who was powerfully used by God at that time was Evan Roberts. Evan was a man broken by God. He had become meek and humble.

I heard that when he was called to preach at some meeting or other he would exercise discernment. If he sensed that the crowd was there to see and hear him, he would not get up to speak. Perhaps he even left.

But when he knew that the people were there to hear from God, he would minister what He had given Him. Evan lived to honor God and not himself.

Why is it today that we see so little genuinely powerful ministry? Why does it seem that the works done by the early apostles were more spectacular? Perhaps it is because today there are so many human elements which have crept into our ministry. So many today are using the things of God to build up personal kingdoms, become wealthy and attract followers.

There is no doubt that God turns away from such spiritually ugly, human works. It may be that

in the beginning some men and women received something from God. But, if and when they become proud and self-seeking, God withdraws from the scene. They are then left with what they can do with their own energy, charismatic personality, oratorical ability and human charm.

Someone once said: "True ministry always meets a need. But it is not supposed to be the need of the one 'ministering' to be seen and heard." This is very true. Meditate on these things.

### EVERY EVIL WORK

When men begin to seek and attain their own "ministries" they need to carve out a "territory" for themselves. They need to attract and then segregate to themselves a good number of followers. The more, the better. This inevitably puts them in competition with one another to see who can become the greatest. Each one needs more adherents than the other.

This situation breeds all kinds of sin. Soon you see pride, contention, envy, strife, criticizing, back biting, hate, etc. We read: "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (Js 3:16). How often this describes the situation in which the church finds herself today!

Dear brothers and sisters, this has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. It is not genuine ministry. It is the product of the flesh of man trying to use the things of God to glorify and please itself. It is a manifestation of another, darker kingdom.

True ministry is the expression of Jesus Christ. It is the revelation of another Life which lives within us. It is motivated, not by anything selfish or human, but by the Father. It is not the transmission of information, but rather the manifestation of God Himself.

Here there is no room for us. Ego has no place. Our own will, needs and desires cannot enter. True spiritual ministry is a very narrow thing. There is only room for one Person, Jesus Christ.

If and when God brings us to this place of humble service, our ministry will become more effective. God will entrust us with more and more of His power. The less we ourselves appear, the more He can do His glorious work through us. The more we simply do "what we see the Father doing," the more potent our work will be.

When God has broken down our own ambition and pride, when we are no longer seeking anything for ourselves, then we will be a vessel which is sanctified and prepared for the Master's use (II Tim 2:21). It is then that we will know true ministry.

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